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REVOLT OF THE TARTARS
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REVOLT OF THE TARTARS

OR

FLIGHT OF THE KALMUCK KHAN

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BY

THOMAS DE QUINCEY

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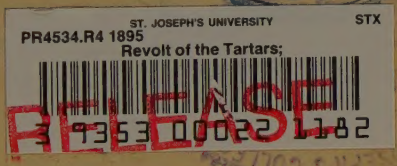

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REVOLT OF THE TARTARS.
M. I

INTRODUCTION.

THE author of the "Revolt of the Tartars," Thomas De Quincey, was born on the 15th of August, 1785, in Manchester, Eng. In his reminiscences of childhood he shows himself to have been a timid, sensitive child, endowed with a capacious memory. He remembered, he said, his terror at the death of a little sister who died when he was a year and a half old, and his grief, also, for the taking-off of a kingfisher, which happened about that time in his history.

In the several schools of his youth he did not lose any of his shyness; but he gained in studiousness, especially in an excellence in Greek and in the subtle intellectual force which is the spirit of the Greek tongue. When he was fifteen, his master remarked of him to a visiting stranger, "That boy could harangue an Athenian mob better than you or I could address an English one." At sixteen he was a runaway in Wales and London, hungry, cold, and destitute of money to buy shelter.

At last, by bartering a part of his prospects of inheritance with a broker, he gained money to go to Oxford. It was here, in 1804, in the midst of his studies, that he first experimented with the deadly drug to which, the rest of his life, he was in some degree the slave. His health had been undermined by his London

starvation and exposure, and an attack of acute neuralgia induced him to take opium.

Leaving Oxford, he sought Wordsworth at Grasmere in the Lake District; and by the kindness of the poet and of his helpful sister Dorothy he established himself in a cottage not far away. "And what am I doing amongst the mountains?" he wrote. "Taking opium. Yes; but what else? Why, reader, in 1812, the year we are now arrived at, as well as for some years previous, I have been chiefly studying German metaphysics, or the writings of Kant, Fichte, Schelling, etc. And how and in what manner do I live? in short, what class or description of men do I belong to? I am at this period—viz., in 1812—living in a cottage, and as a scholar and a man of learned education, I may presume to class myself as an unworthy member of that indefinite body called 'gentlemen.' Partly on the ground I have assigned,—partly because, from having no visible calling or business, it is rightly judged that I must be living on my private fortune,—I am so classed by my neighbors; and by the courtesy of modern England I am usually addressed on letters, etc., 'Esquire.' . . . Am I married? Not yet. And I still take opium? On Saturday nights."

In 1816 De Quincey married the daughter of a neighboring farmer, and now must needs turn to some practical means of support. But his will had been paralyzed by opium, and he had fallen into that deadly torpor of the moral energies which always follows its use. For a time he suffered complete prostration.

The way out of his hideous condition chanced to be through the appearance in a magazine of his "Confessions of an Opium Eater, being an Extract from the Life of a Scholar." The charming imaginativeness of the piece, and its fair literary touch, joined

with its garrulous and unblushing egotism, surprised the public, and made its popularity. From this time, De Quincey helped to support his family by his literary efforts.

Later on he moved to Edinburgh. Here he continued in the city, or in the little cottage of Lasswade, seven miles away,—the cottage of Scott's early married life and first good fortune in literature,—till his death in 1859. These years were full of work. The needs of his family pressed upon him, and incited to his use the vast stores of learning acquired in earlier years. He dealt with many subjects, autobiographic, historical, biographical, speculative, and pure imaginative. The multifariousness of his matter is perhaps one of the strong expressions of his genius.

"For my own part," he said, "without breach of truth or modesty, I may affirm that my life has been, on the whole, the life of a philosopher. From my birth I was made an intellectual creature; and intellectual in the highest sense my pursuits and pleasures have been, even from my schoolboy days." At another time: "I have passed more of my life in absolute and unmitigated solitude, voluntarily and for intellectual purposes, than any person of my age whom I have ever either met with, heard of, or read of."

About the beginning of the eighteenth century, when the celebrated Kang Hi was reigning Emperor of China, there was a revolt of one of his vassal tribes. A whole people withdrew from his protection, and, going westward, of their own will came under the dominion of the Russian Czar. They settled upon the lands that lie between the Volga and the Ural, and there had years of tolerable prosperity. But memories of their old home and the milder rule of the Chinese were always with them.

It happened, therefore, that when Kang Hi had long been dead, and Kien Long, his great and sagacious grandson, had come to the Chinese throne, these Torgouths turned about in mind, and considered the exactions under which they now suffered. The noise of Kien Long's victories was passing from mouth to mouth; and when he had completed his conquest of the turbulent tribes of Central Asia it was toward the year 1770.

Now the Torgouths suffered because the Russians held them as a sort of feudal vassal. They drew away their youth to fight and perhaps to die in Russian wars, and their cattle and other belongings they took to help make the tyrannical government at St. Petersburg more and more tyrannical. Taxes, instead of lessening, increased as the years went on. It is not to be wondered at, then, that, along with the reports of Kien Long's victorious wars, there was whispered also the news of his proclamation, to the effect that the prodigal Torgouths would at any time be welcomed back; for Kien Long was amiable as well as far-sighted.

The exact cause which determined the revolt and flight from Russian authority which the Torgouths planned, historians cannot agree upon. One says that the son of Oubacha, their chief, was seized by the Russians as a hostage. Kien Long in his memoirs, which the French Jesuit missionaries at Pekin have translated, says, "The Russians never ceasing to require him to furnish soldiers for incorporation into their armies; and having at last carried off his own son to serve them as a hostage, and being, besides, of a religion different from his, and paying no respect to that of the lamas, which the Torgouths profess, Oubacha and his people at last determined to shake off a yoke which was becoming daily more and more insupportable."[1] De Quincey, in the following

[1] Quoted by Professor Masson in his edition of Quincey's writings.

splendid essay, attributes the flight to the sinister revenge of Zebek-Dorchi, Oubacha's relative and rival.

Whatever may have been the cause, the Torgouths determined no longer to hesitate. "After having secretly deliberated among themselves, they concluded that they must abandon a residence where they had so much to suffer, in order to come and live more at ease in those parts of the dominion of China where the religion professed is that of Fo."[1]

At the end of the year 1770 they collected their herds and flocks, and began to retrace the flight of the earlier generation. When they broke camp they numbered several hundred thousand souls. "They carried," says Kien Long, "their wives, their children, and all their baggage."

For eight months they traversed the Siberian steppes, at first through the ice and snow of winter, and in the end over the desert and through the maddening heat of summer. The very hugeness of the Russian Empire, and its lack of organization, and the remoteness of its forces, were their guaranties of safety; for the distances were too long and the supply of soldiery too scant to allow the Russians to interrupt, or molest in any considerable way, their flight.

"I knew already," says Kien Long in his narrative, "that the Torgouths were on the march to come and make submission to me. The news was brought me not long after their departure from Etchil [a region of European Russia, north of the Caspian Sea]. I then reflected that as Ileton, general of the troops that are at Ily [Ili, or Kuldja, capital of a mountainous district on the western borders of Chinese or Eastern Turkestan], was already charged with other important affairs, it was to be feared that he would not

[1] Quoted in Masson's editorial note.

be able to regulate with all the requisite attention those which concerned these new refugees. Chouhédé, one of the councilors of the general, was at Ouché [about a hundred and fifty miles south of Ili], charged with keeping order among the Mohammedans there. As he found it within his power to give his attention to the Torgouths, I ordered him to repair to Ily, and do his best for their solid settlement. . . . At the same time I did not neglect any of the precautions that seemed to me necessary. I ordered Chouhédé to raise small forts and redoubts at the most important points, and to cause all the passes to be carefully guarded; and I enjoined on him the duty of himself getting ready the necessary provisions of every kind inside those defenses. . . . The Torgouths arrived, and on arriving found lodgings ready, means of sustenance, and all the conveniences they could have found in their own proper dwellings. This is not all. Those principal men among them who had come personally to do me homage had their expenses paid, and were honorably conducted, by the imperial post road, to the place where I then was. I saw them; I spoke to them; I invited them to partake with me in the pleasures of the chase; and at the end of the number of days appointed for the exercise they attended me in my retinue as far as Gé-hol [the summer residence of the Chinese Emperor, Mu Ching Te, a hundred and ten miles northeast of Pekin]. There I gave them a ceremonial banquet, and made them the customary presents. . . . It was at this Gé-hol, in those charming parts where Kang Hi, my grandfather, made himself an abode to which he could retire during the hot season, at the same time that he thus put himself in a situation to be able to watch with greater care over the welfare of the peoples that are beyond the western frontiers of the empire,—it was, I say, in those lovely parts that . . . one

of the branches of the Eleuths which first separated itself from the trunk, those Torgouths who had voluntarily expatriated themselves to go and live under a foreign and distant dominion, these same Torgouths are come of themselves to submit to me of their own good will; and it happens that it is still at Gé-hol, not far from the venerable spot where my grandfather's ashes repose, that I have the opportunity, which I never sought, of admitting them solemnly into the number of my subjects." [1]

[1] Quoted in Masson's editorial note.

REVOLT OF THE TARTARS;

OR,

FLIGHT OF THE KALMUCK KHAN AND HIS PEOPLE FROM THE RUSSIAN TERRITORIES TO THE FRONTIERS OF CHINA.

THERE is no great event in modern history, or, perhaps it may be said more broadly, none in all history, from its earliest records, less generally known, or more striking to the imagination, than the flight eastwards of a principal Tartar nation across the boundless steppes [1] of Asia in the latter half of the last century. The *terminus a quo* [2] of this flight and the *terminus ad quem* [3] are equally magnificent, — the mightiest of Christian thrones being the one, the mightiest of Pagan the other; [4] and the grandeur of these two terminal objects is harmoniously supported by the romantic [5] circumstances of the flight. In the abruptness of its commencement and the fierce velocity of its execution, we read an expression of the wild, barbaric character of the agents. In the unity of purpose connecting this myriad of wills, and in the blind but unerring aim at a mark so re-

[1] Level tracts or plains in European and Asiatic Russia. They are characterized by a grassy vegetation, rolling hills, sand and alkali patches, lakes, and now and then rivers skirted by trees.

[2] The starting point. [3] The terminating point.

[4] "The mightiest of Christian thrones," i.e., the Russian; "the mightiest of Pagan," i.e., the Chinese.

[5] Having the qualities of the marvelous and imaginative.

mote,[1] there is something which recalls to the mind those almighty instincts that propel the migrations of the swallow or the life-withering[2] marches of the locust. Then, again, in the gloomy vengeance of Russia and her vast artillery, which hung upon the rear and the skirts of the fugitive vassals, we are reminded of Miltonic images, — such, for instance, as that of the solitary hand pursuing through desert spaces and through ancient chaos a rebellious host, and overtaking with volleying thunders those who believed themselves already within the security of darkness and of distance.[3]

We shall have occasion, farther on, to compare this event with other great national catastrophes as to the magnitude of the suffering; but it may also challenge a comparison with similar events under another relation, viz., as to its dramatic capabilities.[4] Few cases, perhaps, in romance or history, can sustain a close collation with this as to the complexity of its separate interests. The great outline of the enterprise, taken in connection with the operative motives, hidden or avowed, and the religious sanctions under which it was pursued, give to the case a triple character: 1st, That of a conspiracy, with as close a unity in the incidents, and as much of a personal interest in the moving characters, with fine dramatic contrasts, as belongs to "Venice Preserved"[5] or to the "Fiesco"[6] of Schiller. 2d, That of a great military expedition offering the same romantic features of vast distances to be traversed, vast reverses to be sustained, untried routes, enemies obscurely ascertained, and hardships too vaguely prefigured, which mark the Egyptian expedition of Cambyses;[7] the anabasis[8] of the

1 That is, China.

2 When clouds of locusts settle upon a land, they eat all tender vegetation

3 See Paradise Lost, II. 77–81. See, also, I. 35–50; II. 24–30, 60–70 VI. 834, 879.

4 Possibilities of being the subject of a drama.

5 The masterpiece of Thomas Otway (1651–85).

6 One of the early dramas of Friedrich Schiller (1759–1805).

7 King of the Medes and Persians, who overran Egypt about 550 B.C.

8 The anabasis, or going up from his satrapy in Asia Minor to the Per

younger Cyrus, and the subsequent retreat of the ten thousand to the Black Sea; the Parthian expeditions[1] of the Romans, especially those of Crassus and Julian; or (as more disastrous than any of them, and in point of space as well as in amount of forces more extensive) the Russian anabasis and catabasis[2] of Napoleon. 3d, That of a religious exodus, authorized by an oracle[3] venerated throughout many nations of Asia,—an exodus, therefore, in so far resembling the great scriptural exodus[4] of the Israelites under Moses and Joshua, as well as in the very peculiar distinction of carrying along with them their entire families, women, children, slaves, their herds of cattle and of sheep, their horses and their camels.

This triple character of the enterprise naturally invests it with a more comprehensive interest; but the dramatic interest which we ascribed to it, or its fitness for a stage representation, depends partly upon the marked variety and the strength of the personal agencies concerned, and partly upon the succession of scenical[5] situations. Even the steppes, the camels, the tents, the snowy

sian capital in the interior, was undertaken by Cyrus to satisfy his ambition of dispossessing his brother, Artaxerxes, of the Persian throne. He marched, says Xenophon, with a hundred thousand barbarians and a little more than ten thousand Greeks. The Greeks remained unconquered at the end of the battle, in which Cyrus was killed, and made a famous retreat through the enemy's country to the sea.

[1] In early history the Parthians dwelt in the mountains to the southwest of the Caspian. Afterwards they extended their kingdom to the Euphrates and Tigris. In 53 B.C. the Romans under Crassus carried war against them to the heart of Mesopotamia. The Roman defeat was followed by the death of Crassus, down whose throat the Parthians, in derision of his love of riches, poured molten gold. The famous Julian, surnamed "the Apostate," led his army into the hostile country of the Persians, and met his early death in battle in A.D. 363.

[2] "A going down." The reference is to Napoleon's retreat from Moscow, which was begun in the autumn of 1812 (see Note 2, p. 40).

[3] The Kalmuck lama, or pontiff (see Note 1, p. 24).

[4] See Exod. i.–xvii.; Josh. i.–xii.

[5] Dramatic; fitted for the theater.

and the sandy deserts, are not beyond the scale of our modern representative powers as often called into action in the theaters both of Paris and London; and the series of situations unfolded, beginning with the general conflagration on the Volga, passing thence to the disastrous scenes of the flight (as it literally was in its commencement); to the Tartar siege of the Russian fortress Koulagina; the bloody engagement with the Cossacks[1] in the mountain passes at Ouchim; the surprisal by the Bashkirs[2] and the advanced posts of the Russian army at Turgai;[3] the private conspiracy at this point against the khan;[4] the long succession of running fights; the parting massacres at the Lake of Tengis under the eyes of the Chinese;[5] and finally the tragical retribution to Zebek-Dorchi at the hunting lodge of the Chinese Emperor,—all these situations communicate a scenical animation to the wild romance, if treated dramatically; whilst a higher and a philosophic interest belongs to it as a case of authentic history, commemorating a great revolution, for good and for evil, in the fortunes of a whole people,—a people semibarbarous, but simple-hearted and of ancient descent.

On the 21st of January, 1761, the young Prince Oubacha assumed the scepter of the Kalmucks[6] upon the death of his father. Some part of the power attached to this dignity he had already wielded since his fourteenth year, in quality of vice-khan, by the

[1] A military people living in the southeastern part of Russia and in Siberia. They are supposed to be of Russian origin, forced into a tribal existence for self-defense (see pp. 48, 49).

[2] Uncivilized tribes of a Finnish and Tartar ancestry, found west of the Ural Mountains in the south of Russia, and partly nomadic. They were conquered by the Russians in the eighteenth century.

[3] City and river of Siberia, north of the Aral Sea, in the province of Turgansk.

[4] The name of the chiefs or kings of the petty tribes of west Central Asia.

[5] See p. 67.

[6] Used here interchangeably with Tartars. They are of the Mongolian family, and live in southeastern Russia and in parts of Siberia and the Chinese Empire.

express appointment, and with the avowed support, of the Russian Government. He was now about eighteen years of age, amiable in his personal character, and not without titles to respect in his public character as a sovereign prince. In times more peaceable, and amongst a people more entirely civilized or more humanized by religion, it is even probable that he might have discharged his high duties with considerable distinction; but his lot was thrown upon stormy times, and a most difficult crisis amongst tribes whose native ferocity was exasperated by debasing forms of superstition, and by a nationality as well as an inflated conceit of their own merit absolutely unparalleled; whilst the circumstances of their hard and trying position under the jealous surveillance [1] of an irresistible lord paramount,[2] in the person of the Russian Czar, gave a fiercer edge to the natural unamiableness of the Kalmuck disposition, and irritated its gloomier qualities into action under the restless impulses of suspicion and permanent distrust. No prince could hope for a cordial allegiance from his subjects, or a peaceful reign, under the circumstances of the case; for the dilemma in which a Kalmuck ruler stood at present was of this nature: *wanting* the sanction and support of the Czar, he was inevitably too weak from without to command confidence from his subjects, or resistance to his competitors. On the other hand, *with* this kind of support, and deriving his title in any degree from the favor of the imperial court, he became almost in that extent an object of hatred at home and within the whole compass of his own territory. He was at once an object of hatred for the past, being a living monument of national independence ignominiously surrendered, and an object of jealousy for the future, as one who had already advertised himself to be a fitting tool for the ultimate purposes (whatsoever those might prove to be) of the Russian court. Coming himself to the Kalmuck scepter under the heaviest weight of prejudice from the unfortunate circumstances of his position, it might have been expected that Oubacha would have been preëminently an object of detestation; for, besides his

[1] Oversight; supervision; watch.

[2] The supreme lord.

known dependence upon the cabinet [1] of St. Petersburg, the direct line of succession had been set aside, and the principle of inheritance violently suspended, in favor of his own father, so recently as nineteen years before the era of his own accession, consequently within the lively remembrance of the existing generation. He therefore, almost equally with his father, stood within the full current of the national prejudices, and might have anticipated the most pointed hostility. But it was not so: such are the caprices in human affairs that he was even, in a moderate sense, popular, —a benefit which wore the more cheering aspect and the promises of permanence, inasmuch as he owed it exclusively to his personal qualities of kindness and affability, as well as to the beneficence of his government. On the other hand, to balance this unlooked-for prosperity at the outset of his reign, he met with a rival in popular favor, almost a competitor, in the person of Zebek-Dorchi, a prince with considerable pretensions to the throne, and perhaps it might be said, with equal pretensions. Zebek-Dorchi was a direct descendant of the same royal house as himself, through a different branch. On public grounds his claim stood, perhaps, on a footing equally good with that of Oubacha; whilst his personal qualities, even in those aspects which seemed to a philosophical observer most odious and repulsive, promised the most effectual aid to the dark purposes of an intriguer or a conspirator, and were generally fitted to win a popular support precisely in those points where Oubacha was most defective. He was much superior in external appearance to his rival on the throne, and so far better qualified to win the good opinion of a semibarbarous people; whilst his dark intellectual qualities of Machiavellian [2] dissimulation, profound hypocrisy, and perfidy which knew no touch of remorse, were admirably calculated to sustain any ground which he might win from the simple-hearted

[1] The imperial cabinet, or council, which aided the Empress Elizabeth in carrying on the government of Russia.

[2] Machiavelli (1469–1527) was a Florentine diplomatist and writer whose political dissimulation and hypocrisy have become proverbial.

people with whom he had to deal, and from the frank carelessness of his unconscious competitor.

At the very outset of his treacherous career, Zebek-Dorchi was sagacious enough to perceive that nothing could be gained by open declaration of hostility to the reigning prince. The choice had been a deliberate act on the part of Russia; and Elizabeth Petrowna[1] was not the person to recall her own favors with levity or upon slight grounds. Openly, therefore, to have declared his enmity towards his relative on the throne could have had no effect but that of arming suspicions against his own ulterior purposes in a quarter where it was most essential to his interest that for the present all suspicion should be hoodwinked.[2] Accordingly, after much meditation, the course he took for opening his snares was this: he raised a rumor that his own life was in danger from the plots of several *saissang* (that is, Kalmuck nobles) who were leagued together under an oath to assassinate him; and immediately after, assuming a well-counterfeited alarm, he fled to Tcherkask,[3] followed by sixty-five tents.[4] From this place he kept up a correspondence with the imperial court, and, by way of soliciting his cause more effectually, he soon repaired in person to St. Petersburg. Once admitted to personal conferences with the cabinet, he found no difficulty in winning over the Russian councils to a concurrence with some of his political views, and thus covertly introducing the point of that wedge which was finally to accomplish his purposes. In particular, he persuaded the Russian Government to make a very important alteration in the constitution of the Kalmuck state council, which in effect reorganized the whole political condition of the state, and disturbed

[1] A daughter of Peter the Great and Catharine I. She dispossessed the reigning Czar, a child a few months old, and administered the government successfully, till her death in 1762.

[2] In the old sport of hawking, or falconry, "when the hawk was not flying at her game, she was usually hoodwinked (blindfolded) with a cap or hood . . . fitted to her head."

[3] Circassia, at the northeast corner of the Black Sea.

[4] The people dwelling under sixty-five tents.

the balance of power[1] as previously adjusted. Of this council, in the Kalmuck language called *sarga*, there were eight members, called *sargatchi*; and hitherto it had been the custom that these eight members should be entirely subordinate to the khan, holding, in fact, the ministerial[2] character of secretaries and assistants, but in no respect ranking as coördinate authorities. That had produced some inconveniences in former reigns; and it was easy for Zebek-Dorchi to point the jealousy of the Russian court to others more serious which might arise in future circumstances of war or other contingencies. It was resolved, therefore, to place the *sargatchi* henceforward on a footing of perfect independence, and therefore (as regarded responsibility) on a footing of equality with the khan. Their independence, however, had respect only to their own sovereign; for towards Russia they were placed in a new attitude of direct duty and accountability by the creation in their favor of small pensions (three hundred rubles[3] a year), which, however, to a Kalmuck of that day, were more considerable than might be supposed, and had a further value as marks of honorary distinction emanating from a great Empress. Thus far the purposes of Zebek-Dorchi were served effectually for the moment; but apparently it was only for the moment, since, in the further development of his plots, this very dependency upon Russian influence would be the most serious obstacle in his way. There was, however, another point carried, which outweighed all inferior considerations, as it gave him a power of setting aside discretionally whatsoever should arise to disturb his plots,—he was himself appointed president and controller of the *sargatchi*. The Russian court had been aware of his high pretensions by birth, and hoped by this promotion to satisfy the ambition which in some degree was acknowledged to be a reasonable passion for any man occupying his situation.

[1] "The balance of power," i.e., a distribution and opposition of force.

[2] Pertaining to a minister, or ministry of state.

[3] The value of the ruble has varied at different times: it is now about seventy-seven cents. In the fourteenth century the Russians began to use

Having thus completely blindfolded the cabinet of Russia, Zebek-Dorchi proceeded in his new character to fulfill his political mission with the Khan of the Kalmucks. So artfully did he prepare the road for his favorable reception at the court of this prince, that he was at once and universally welcomed as a public benefactor. The pensions of the councilors were so much additional wealth poured into the Tartar exchequer: as to the ties of dependency [1] thus created, experience had not yet enlightened these simple tribes as to that result. And that he himself should be the chief of these mercenary councilors was so far from being charged upon Zebek as any offense, or any ground of suspicion, that his relative the khan returned him hearty thanks for his services, under the belief that he could have accepted this appointment only with a view to keep out other and more unwelcome pretenders, who would not have had the same motives of consanguinity or friendship for executing its duties in a spirit of kindness to the Kalmucks. The first use which he made of his new functions about the khan's person was to attack the court of Russia, by a romantic [2] villainy not easily to be credited, for those very acts of interference with the council which he himself had prompted. This was a dangerous step; but it was indispensable to his further advance upon the gloomy path which he had traced out for himself. A triple vengeance was what he meditated: (1) upon the Russian cabinet, for having undervalued his own pretensions to the throne; (2) upon his amiable rival, for having supplanted him; and (3) upon all those of the nobility who had manifested their sense of his weakness by their neglect, or their sense of his perfidious character by their suspicions. Here was a colossal outline of wickedness; and by one in his situation, feeble (as it might seem) for the accomplishment of its humblest parts, how was the total edifice to be reared in its comprehensive

silver in bars for the purposes of trade. The piece cut off (ruble) is named from the Russian "cut" (*rubiti*).

1 Dependence upon or reference to the Russian court.

2 Marvelous; chimerical.

grandeur? He, a worm as he was, could he venture to assail the mighty behemoth[1] of Muscovy,[2] the potentate who counted three hundred languages around the footsteps of his throne, and from whose "lion ramp"[3] recoiled alike "baptized and infidel,"[4] — Christendom on the one side, strong by her intellect and her organization, and the "barbaric East" on the other, with her unnumbered numbers? The match was a monstrous one; but in its very monstrosity there lay this germ of encouragement, — that it could not be suspected. The very hopelessness of the scheme grounded his hope; and he resolved to execute a vengeance which should involve, as it were, in the unity[5] of a well-laid tragic fable, all whom he judged to be his enemies. That vengeance lay in detaching from the Russian Empire the whole Kalmuck nation, and breaking up that system of intercourse which had thus far been beneficial to both. This last was a consideration which moved him but little. True it was that Russia to the Kalmucks had secured lands and extensive pasturage; true it was that the Kalmucks reciprocally to Russia had furnished a powerful cavalry; but the latter loss would be part of his triumph, and the former might be more than compensated in other climates, under other sovereigns. Here was a scheme, which, in its final accomplishment, would avenge him bitterly on the Czarina, and in the course of its accomplishment might furnish him with ample occasions for removing his other enemies. It may be readily supposed, indeed, that he who could deliberately raise his eyes to the Russian autocrat[6] as an antagonist in single duel with himself was not likely to feel much anxiety about Kal-

[1] Meaning "great beast" in Hebrew. The word occurs in Job xl. 15.

[2] An old name for Russia.

[3] Leap; spring. The phrase is from Milton's Samson Agonistes, line 139.

[4] "Baptized and infidel," i.e., Christian and Mohammedan (see Paradise Lost, I. 582).

[5] The quality by which all the particulars should be subordinated to the one general design, — in this instance of vengeance.

[6] The "Autocrat of all the Russias" is a title assumed by the Czar. The word is derived from the Greek, and means "ruling by one's self."

muck enemies of whatever rank. He took his resolution, therefore, sternly and irrevocably to effect this astonishing translation of an ancient people across the pathless deserts of Central Asia, intersected continually by rapid rivers rarely furnished with bridges, and of which the fords were known only to those who might think it for their interest to conceal them, through many nations inhospitable or hostile, — frost and snow around them (from the necessity of commencing their flight in the winter), famine in their front, and the saber, or even the artillery, of an offended and mighty empress hanging upon their rear for thousands of miles. But what was to be their final mark, the port of shelter, after so fearful a course of wandering? Two things were evident: it must be some power at a great distance from Russia, so as to make return even in that view hopeless, and it must be a power of sufficient rank to insure them protection from any hostile efforts on the part of the Czarina for reclaiming them or for chastising their revolt. Both conditions were united obviously in the person of Kien Long,[1] the reigning Emperor of China, who was further recommended to them by his respect for the head of their religion. To China, therefore, and, as their first rendezvous, to the shadow of the great Chinese Wall,[2] it was settled by Zebek that they should direct their flight.

Next came the question of time, *When* should the flight commence? and finally the more delicate question as to the choice of accomplices. To extend the knowledge of the conspiracy too far was to insure its betrayal to the Russian Government. Yet at some stage of the preparations it was evident that a very extensive confidence must be made, because in no other way could

[1] "Kien Long, Emperor of China 1735–96, was the fourth Chinese emperor of the Mantchoo-Tartar dynasty, and a man of the highest reputation for ability and accomplishment." — MASSON.

[2] The wall was designed as a fortification against hostile tribes to the north of the empire. It was begun in 214 B.C. It is about fourteen hundred miles long, and upon the plain thirty feet high. When carried over rocks, it is not so high. It is defended by towers placed at short intervals.

the mass of the Kalmuck population be persuaded to furnish their families with the requisite equipments for so long a migration. This critical step, however, it was resolved to defer up to the latest possible moment, and at all events to make no general communication on the subject until the time of departure should be definitely settled. In the meantime Zebek admitted only three persons to his confidence, of whom Oubacha, the reigning prince, was almost necessarily one; but him, from his yielding and somewhat feeble character, he viewed rather in the light of a tool than as one of his active accomplices. Those whom (if anybody) he admitted to an unreserved participation in his counsels were two only,—the great lama[1] among the Kalmucks, and his own father-in-law, Erempel, a ruling prince of some tribe in the neighborhood of the Caspian Sea, recommended to his favor not so much by any strength of talent corresponding to the occasion as by his blind devotion to himself and his passionate anxiety to promote the elevation of his daughter and his son-in-law to the throne of a sovereign prince. A titular[2] prince, Zebek already was; but this dignity, without the substantial accompaniment of a scepter, seemed but an empty sound to both of these ambitious rivals. The other accomplice, whose name was Loo-sang-Dchaltzan, and whose rank was that of lama, or Kalmuck pontiff, was a person of far more distinguished pretensions. He had something of the same gloomy and terrific pride which marked the character of Zebek himself, manifesting also the same energy, accompanied by the same unfaltering cruelty, and a natural facility of dissimulation even more profound. It was by this man that the other question was settled as to the time for giving effect to their designs. His own pontifical[3] character

[1] A Thibetan word for spiritual lord; a priest of Lamaism, one of the forms of the Buddhistic religion. There are several grades of lamas. This was the highest ecclesiastic among the Kalmucks. Of still higher rank is the dalai, or grand lama, who lives in Lassa, Thibet.

[2] Being such only in name; nominal.

[3] Belonging to a pontiff, or high priest.

had suggested to him, that in order to strengthen their influence with the vast mob of simple-minded men whom they were to lead into a howling wilderness, after persuading them to lay desolate their own ancient hearths, it was indispensable that they should be able, in cases of extremity, to plead the express sanction of God for their entire enterprise. This could only be done by addressing themselves to the great head of their religion,—the dalai lama of Thibet. Him they easily persuaded to countenance their schemes; and an oracle was delivered solemnly at Thibet, to the effect that no ultimate prosperity would attend this great exodus unless it were pursued through the years of the *tiger* and the *hare*. Now, the Kalmuck custom is to distinguish their years by attaching to each a denomination taken from one of twelve animals, the exact order of succession being absolutely fixed; so that the cycle revolves, of course, through a period of a dozen years. Consequently, if the approaching year of the *tiger* were suffered to escape them, in that case the expedition must be delayed for twelve years more, within which period, even were no other unfavorable changes to arise, it was pretty well foreseen that the Russian Government would take the most effectual means for bridling their vagrant propensities by a ring fence of forts, or military posts, to say nothing of the still readier plan for securing their fidelity (a plan already talked of in all quarters) by exacting a large body of hostages selected from the families of the most influential nobles. On these cogent considerations it was solemnly determined that this terrific experiment should be made in the next year of the *tiger*, which happened to fall upon the Christian year 1771. With respect to the month, there was, unhappily for the Kalmucks, even less latitude allowed to their choice than with respect to the year. It was absolutely necessary, or it was thought so, that the different divisions of the nation, which pastured their flocks on both banks of the Volga, should have the means of effecting an instantaneous junction, because the danger of being intercepted by flying columns of the imperial armies was precisely the greatest at the outset. Now, from the want of

bridges, or sufficient river craft for transporting so vast a body of men, the sole means which could be depended upon (especially where so many women, children, and camels were concerned) was *ice;* and this, in a state of sufficient firmness, could not be absolutely counted upon before the month of January. Hence it happened that this astonishing exodus of a whole nation — before so much as a whisper of the design had begun to circulate amongst those whom it most interested, before it was even suspected that any man's wishes pointed in that direction — had been definitively appointed for January of the year 1771; and, almost up to the Christmas of 1770, the poor, simple Kalmuck herdsmen and their families were going nightly to their peaceful beds without even dreaming that the fiat[1] had already gone forth from their rulers which consigned those quiet abodes, together with the peace and comfort which reigned within them, to a withering desolation, now close at hand.

Meantime war raged on a great scale between Russia and the Sultan;[2] and, until the time arrived for throwing off their vassalage,[3] it was necessary that Oubacha should contribute his usual contingent of martial aid: nay, it had unfortunately become prudent that he should contribute much more than his usual aid. Human experience gives ample evidence that in some mysterious and unaccountable way no great design is ever agitated, no matter how few or how faithful may be the participators, but that some presentiment, some dim misgiving, is kindled amongst those whom it is chiefly important to blind. And, however it might have happened, certain it is that already, when as yet no syllable of the conspiracy had been breathed to any man whose very

1 The Latin for "let it be done;" an absolute command.

2 France had induced Turkey to declare war against Russia in 1769. The object was to create a diversion from the Poles. At the signing of peace in 1774, the Sultan acknowledged the independence of the Mongols of the Crimea.

3 Dependence; subjection; the condition of holding their lands with the obligation to render military service to their chief ruler.

existence was not staked upon its concealment, nevertheless some vague and uneasy jealousy had arisen in the Russian cabinet as to the future schemes of the Kalmuck khan; and very probable it is, that but for the war then raging, and the consequent prudence of conciliating a very important vassal, or at least of abstaining from what would powerfully alienate him, even at that moment, such measures would have been adopted as must forever have intercepted the Kalmuck schemes. Slight as were the jealousies of the imperial court, they had not escaped the Machiavellian eyes of Zebek and the lama; and under their guidance, Oubacha, bending to the circumstances of the moment, and meeting the jealousy of the Russian court with a policy corresponding to their own, strove by unusual zeal to efface the Czarina's unfavorable impressions. He enlarged the scale of his contributions, and *that* so prodigiously, that he absolutely carried to headquarters a force of thirty-five thousand cavalry, fully equipped. Some go further, and rate the amount beyond forty thousand; but the smaller estimate is, at all events, *within* the truth.

With this magnificent array of cavalry, heavy as well as light,[1] the khan went into the field under great expectations; and these he more than realized. Having the good fortune to be concerned with so ill-organized and disorderly a description of force as that which at all times composed the bulk of a Turkish army, he carried victory along with his banners, gained many partial successes, and at last, in a pitched battle, overthrew the Turkish force opposed to him, with a loss of five thousand men left upon the field.

These splendid achievements seemed likely to operate in various ways against the impending revolt. Oubacha had now a strong motive, in the martial glory acquired, for continuing his connection with the empire in whose service he had won it, and by whom only it could be fully appreciated. He was now a great marshal of a great empire,—one of the paladins[2] around

[1] A division of cavalry which is based on the weight of men, horses, and equipments.

[2] Defending warrior; heroic champion. In the romances which were

the imperial throne. In China he would be nobody, or (worse than that) a mendicant alien,[1] prostrate at the feet, and soliciting the precarious alms, of a prince with whom he had no connection. Besides, it might reasonably be expected that the Czarina, grateful for the really efficient aid given by the Tartar prince, would confer upon him such eminent rewards as might be sufficient to anchor his hopes upon Russia and to wean him from every possible seduction. These were the obvious suggestions of prudence and good sense to every man who stood neutral in the case. But they were disappointed. The Czarina knew her obligations to the khan; but she did not acknowledge them. Wherefore? That is a mystery perhaps never to be explained. So it was, however. The khan went unhonored; no ukase[2] ever proclaimed his merits; and perhaps, had he even been abundantly recompensed by Russia, there were others who would have defeated these tendencies to reconciliation. Erempel, Zebek, and Loosang the lama were pledged life-deep to prevent any accommodation; and their efforts were unfortunately seconded by those of their deadliest enemies. In the Russian court there were at that time some great nobles preoccupied with feelings of hatred and blind malice towards the Kalmucks, quite as strong as any which the Kalmucks could harbor towards Russia, and not, perhaps, so well founded. Just as much as the Kalmucks hated the Russian yoke, their galling assumption of authority, the marked air of disdain, as towards a nation of ugly, stupid, and filthy barbarians,[3] which too generally marked the Russian bearing and language,—but, above all, the insolent contempt, or even outrages, which the Russian governors or great military commandants tolerated in their followers towards the barbarous

sung and written about the name and times of Charlemagne for a center, the title was given to the knights who accompanied the King to war.

[1] One living in a country other than that of his birth, and not having therein rights of citizenship.

[2] An order or edict given out by the Russian Government.

[3] That is, the Kalmucks.

religion and superstitious mummeries of the Kalmuck priesthood, —precisely in that extent did the ferocity of the Russian resentment, and their wrath at seeing the trampled worm turn, or attempt a feeble retaliation, react upon the unfortunate Kalmucks. At this crisis it is probable that envy and wounded pride, upon witnessing the splendid victories of Oubacha and Momotbacha over the Turks and Bashkirs,[1] contributed strength to the Russian irritation; and it must have been through the intrigues of those nobles about her person who chiefly smarted under these feelings, that the Czarina could ever have lent herself to the unwise and ungrateful policy pursued at this critical period towards the Kalmuck khan. That Czarina was no longer Elizabeth Petrowna: it was Catharine II.,[2] a princess who did not often err so injuriously (injuriously for herself as much as for others) in the measures of her government. She had soon ample reason for repenting of her false policy. Meantime, how much it must have coöperated with the other motives previously acting upon Oubacha in sustaining his determination to revolt, and how powerfully it must have assisted the efforts of all the Tartar chieftains in preparing the minds of their people to feel the necessity of this difficult enterprise, by arming their pride and their suspicions against the Russian Government, through the keenness of their sympathy with the wrongs of their insulted prince, may be readily imagined. It is a fact, and it has been confessed by candid Russians themselves when treating of this great dismemberment,[3] that the conduct of the Russian cabinet throughout the period of suspense, and during the crisis of hesitation in the Kalmuck council, was exactly such as was most desirable for the

[1] See Note 2, p. 16.

[2] Catharine was a German princess who had married, at Elizabeth's wish, her nephew and successor, Peter III. She rose against her husband shortly after he came to the throne, and was declared Czarina. Peter was imprisoned, and after a few days strangled. Catharine reigned till 1796. The measures of reform which she undertook had little result.

[3] The separation of the Tartars from the Russian Empire.

purposes of the conspirators: it was such, in fact, as to set the seal to all their machinations,[1] by supplying distinct evidences and official vouchers for what could otherwise have been, at the most, matters of doubtful suspicion and indirect presumption.

Nevertheless, in the face of all these arguments, and even allowing their weight so far as not at all to deny the injustice or the impolicy of the imperial ministers, it is contended by many persons who have reviewed the affair with a command of all the documents bearing on the case, more especially the letters or minutes of council subsequently discovered, in the handwriting of Zebek-Dorchi, and the important evidence of the Russian captive Weseloff, who was carried off by the Kalmucks in their flight,[2] that beyond all doubt Oubacha was powerless for any purpose of impeding or even of delaying the revolt. He himself, indeed, was under religious obligations of the most terrific solemnity never to flinch from the enterprise, or even to slacken in his zeal; for Zebek-Dorchi, distrusting the firmness of his resolution under any unusual pressure of alarm or difficulty, had, in the very earliest stage of the conspiracy, availed himself of the khan's well-known superstition to engage him, by means of previous concert with the priests and their head the lama, in some dark and mysterious rites of consecration, terminating in oaths under such terrific sanctions as no Kalmuck would have courage to violate. As far, therefore, as regarded the personal share of the khan in what was to come, Zebek was entirely at his ease. He knew him to be so deeply pledged by religious terrors to the prosecution of the conspiracy, that no honors within the Czarina's gift could have possibly shaken his adhesion; and then, as to threats from the same quarter, he knew him to be sealed against those fears by others of a gloomier character, and better adapted to his peculiar temperament. For Oubacha was a brave man as respected all bodily enemies or the dangers of human warfare, but was as sensitive and timid as the most superstitious of old women in facing the frowns of a priest, or under the vague antici-

[1] Plots; treacherous schemes.

[2] See pp. 56–60.

pations of ghostly retributions. But had it been otherwise, and had there been any reason to apprehend an unsteady demeanor on the part of this prince at the approach of the critical moment, such were the changes already effected in the state of their domestic politics amongst the Tartars by the undermining arts of Zebek-Dorchi and his ally the lama, that very little importance would have attached to that doubt. All power was now effectually lodged in the hands of Zebek-Dorchi. He was the true and absolute wielder of the Kalmuck scepter. All measures of importance were submitted to his discretion, and nothing was finally resolved but under his dictation. This result he had brought about in a year or two by means sufficiently simple: first of all, by availing himself of the prejudice in his favor, so largely diffused amongst the lowest of the Kalmucks, that his own title to the throne, in quality of great-grandson in a direct line from Ajouka,[1] the most illustrious of all the Kalmuck khans, stood upon a better basis than that of Oubacha, who derived from a collateral branch; secondly, with respect to that sole advantage which Oubacha possessed above himself in the ratification of his title, by improving this difference between their situations to the disadvantage of his competitor, as one who had not scrupled to accept that triumph from an alien power at the price of his independence, which he himself (as he would have it understood) disdained to court; thirdly, by his own talents and

1 "Tsé-ouang-raptan then reigned over the Eleuths, one of the branches of the Tartars; and Ayouki, over the Torgouths, another branch of the Tartars, dwelling in and belonging to the Chinese Empire. These two chiefs, being on bad terms with each other, had their mutual contests, of which Ayouki, who was the weaker, feared that in the end he would be the unhappy victim. He formed the project of withdrawing himself forever from the domination of the Eleuths. He took secret measures for securing the flight which he meditated, and sought safety, with all his people, in the territories which are under the dominion of the Russians. These permitted them to establish themselves in the country of Etchil [the country between the Volga and the Jaik, a little to the north of the Caspian Sea]."—TRANSLATION FROM KIEN LONG'S NARRATIVE (quoted by Professor Masson).

address, coupled with the ferocious energy of his moral character; fourthly, and perhaps in an equal degree, by the criminal facility and good nature of Oubacha; finally (which is remarkable enough, as illustrating the character of the man), by that very new modeling of the *sarga*, or privy council, which he had used as a principal topic of abuse and malicious insinuation against the Russian Government, whilst in reality he first had suggested the alteration to the Empress, and he chiefly appropriated the political advantages which it was fitted to yield. For as he was himself appointed the chief of the *sargatchi*, and as the pensions of the inferior *sargatchi* passed through his hands, whilst in effect they owed their appointments to his nomination, it may be easily supposed, that whatever power existed in the state capable of controlling the khan, being held by the *sarga* under its new organization, and this body being completely under his influence, the final result was to throw all the functions[1] of the state, whether nominally in the prince or in the council, substantially into the hands of this one man; whilst at the same time, from the strict league which he maintained with the lama, all the thunders of the spiritual power were always ready to come in aid of the magistrate, or to supply his incapacity in cases which he could not reach.

But the time was now rapidly approaching for the mighty experiment. The day was drawing near on which the signal was to be given for raising the standard of revolt, and, by a combined movement on both sides of the Volga, for spreading the smoke of one vast conflagration that should wrap in a common blaze their own huts and the stately cities of their enemies over the breadth and length of those great provinces in which their flocks were dispersed. The year of the *tiger* was now within one little month of its commencement. The fifth morning of that year was fixed for the fatal day when the fortunes and happiness of a whole nation were to be put upon the hazard of a dicer's throw; and as yet that nation was in profound ignorance of the whole

[1] Exercise and discharge of state offices.

plan. The khan, such was the kindness of his nature, could not bring himself to make the revelation so urgently required. It was clear, however, that this could not be delayed; and Zebek-Dorchi took the task willingly upon himself. But where or how should this notification be made, so as to exclude Russian hearers? After some deliberation the following plan was adopted: couriers, it was contrived, should arrive in furious haste, one upon the heels of another, reporting a sudden inroad of the Kirghises[1] and Bashkirs upon the Kalmuck lands at a point distant about one hundred and twenty miles. Thither all the Kalmuck families, according to immemorial custom, were required to send a separate representative; and there, accordingly, within three days, all appeared. The distance, the solitary ground appointed for the rendezvous, the rapidity of the march, — all tended to make it almost certain that no Russian could be present. Zebek-Dorchi then came forward. He did not waste many words upon rhetoric. He unfurled an immense sheet of parchment, visible from the outermost distance at which any of this vast crowd could stand. The total number amounted to eighty thousand: all saw, and many heard. They were told of the oppressions of Russia; of her pride and haughty disdain, evidenced towards them by a thousand acts; of her contempt for their religion; of her determination to reduce them to absolute slavery; of the preliminary measures she had already taken by erecting forts upon many of the great rivers of their neighborhood; of the ulterior intentions she thus announced to circumscribe their pastoral lands, until they would all be obliged to renounce their flocks, and to collect in towns like Sarepta,[2] there to pursue mechanical and servile trades of shoemaker, tailor, and weaver, such as the freeborn Tartar had always disdained. "Then, again," said the subtle prince, "she increases her military levies upon our population every year. We pour out our blood as

[1] Barbarous tribes of Tartar stock intermixed with Mongol, Turk, etc. They live in the steppes named after them, east of the Caspian Sea.

[2] A Moravian colony near the great bend of the Volga.

young men in her defense, or more often in support of her insolent aggressions; and as old men we reap nothing from our sufferings, nor benefit by our survivorship where so many are sacrificed." At this point of his harangue, Zebek produced several papers (forged, as it is generally believed, by himself and the lama) containing projects of the Russian court for a general transfer of the eldest sons, taken *en masse*[1] from the greatest Kalmuck families, to the imperial court. "Now, let this be once accomplished," he argued, "and there is an end of all useful resistance from that day forwards. Petitions we might make, or even remonstrances; as men of words, we might play a bold part: but for deeds, for that sort of language by which our ancestors were used to speak, holding us by such a chain, Russia would make a jest of our wishes, knowing full well that we should not dare to make any effectual movement."

Having thus sufficiently roused the angry passions of his vast audience, and having alarmed their fears by this pretended scheme against their firstborn (an artifice which was indispensable to his purpose, because it met beforehand *every* form of amendment to his proposal coming from the more moderate nobles, who would not otherwise have failed to insist upon trying the effect of bold addresses to the Empress before resorting to any desperate extremity), Zebek-Dorchi opened his scheme of revolt, and, if so, of instant revolt, since any preparations reported at St. Petersburg would be a signal for the armies of Russia to cross into such positions from all parts of Asia as would effectually intercept their march. It is remarkable, however, that, with all his audacity and his reliance upon the momentary excitement of the Kalmucks, the subtle prince did not venture at this stage of his seduction to make so startling a proposal as that of a flight to China. All that he held out for the present was a rapid march to the Temba[2] or some other great river, which they were to cross, and to take up

[1] In a body; a French phrase.

[2] The Yemba or Emba, one of the northeastern affluents of the Caspian Sea.

a strong position on the farther bank, from which, as from a post of conscious security, they could hold a bolder language to the Czarina, and one which would have a better chance of winning a favorable audience.

These things, in the irritated condition of the simple Tartars, passed by acclamation; and all returned homewards to push forward with the most furious speed the preparations for their awful undertaking. Rapid and energetic these of necessity were; and in that degree they became noticeable and manifest to the Russians who happened to be intermingled with the different hordes, either on commercial errands or as agents officially from the Russian Government,—some in a financial, others in a diplomatic character.

Amongst these last (indeed, at the head of them) was a Russian of some distinction, by name Kichinskoi,—a man memorable for his vanity, and memorable also as one of the many victims to the Tartar revolution. This Kichinskoi had been sent by the Empress as her envoy to overlook the conduct of the Kalmucks. He was styled the *grand pristaw*, or great commissioner, and was universally known amongst the Tartar tribes by this title. His mixed character of ambassador and of political *surveillant*,[1] combined with the dependent state of the Kalmucks, gave him a real weight in the Tartar councils, and might have given him a far greater, had not his outrageous self-conceit and his arrogant confidence in his own authority, as due chiefly to his personal qualities for command, led him into such harsh displays of power, and menaces so odious to the Tartar pride, as very soon made him an object of their profoundest malice. He had publicly insulted the khan; and upon making a communication to him to the effect that some reports began to circulate, and even to reach the Empress, of a design in agitation to fly from the imperial dominions, he had ventured to say, "But this you dare not attempt. I laugh at such rumors: yes, khan, I laugh at them to the Empress; for you are a chained bear, and that you know." The khan turned

[1] Overseer.

away on his heel with marked disdain; and the pristaw, foaming at the mouth, continued to utter, amongst those of the khan's attendants who staid behind to catch his real sentiments in a moment of unguarded passion, all that the blindest frenzy of rage could suggest to the most presumptuous of fools. It was now ascertained that suspicions *had* arisen; but at the same time it was ascertained that the pristaw spoke no more than the truth in representing himself to have discredited these suspicions. The fact was, that the mere infatuation of vanity made him believe that nothing could go on undetected by his all-piercing sagacity, and that no rebellion could prosper when rebuked by his commanding presence. The Tartars, therefore, pursued their preparations, confiding in the obstinate blindness of the grand pristaw, as in their perfect safeguard. And such it proved, to his own ruin as well as that of myriads beside.

Christmas arrived; and a little before that time courier upon courier came dropping in, one upon the very heels of another, to St. Petersburg, assuring the Czarina that beyond all doubt the Kalmucks were in the very crisis of departure. These dispatches came from the Governor of Astrachan; and copies were instantly forwarded to Kichinskoi. Now, it happened that between this governor, a Russian named Beketoff, and the pristaw, had been an ancient feud. The very name of Beketoff inflamed his resentment; and no sooner did he see that hated name attached to the dispatch than he felt himself confirmed in his former views with tenfold bigotry, and wrote instantly, in terms of the most pointed ridicule, against the new alarmist, pledging his own head upon the visionariness of his alarms. Beketoff, however, was not to be put down by a few hard words or by ridicule. He persisted in his statements. The Russian ministry were confounded by the obstinacy of the disputants; and some were beginning even to treat the Governor of Astrachan as a bore and as the dupe of his own nervous terrors, when the memorable day arrived, the fatal 5th of January, which forever terminated the dispute, and put a seal upon the earthly hopes and fortunes of

unnumbered myriads. The Governor of Astrachan was the first to hear the news. Stung by the mixed furies of jealousy, of triumphant vengeance, and of anxious ambition, he sprang into his sledge, and at the rate of three hundred miles a day pursued his route to St. Petersburg, rushed into the imperial presence, announced the total realization of his worst predictions, and upon the confirmation of this intelligence by subsequent dispatches from many different posts on the Volga, he received an imperial commission to seize the person of his deluded enemy and to keep him in strict captivity. These orders were eagerly fulfilled; and the unfortunate Kichinskoi soon afterward expired of grief and mortification in the gloomy solitude of a dungeon,—a victim to his own immeasurable vanity and the blinding self-delusions of a presumption that refused all warning.

The Governor of Astrachan had been but too faithful a prophet. Perhaps even *he* was surprised at the suddenness with which the verification followed his reports. Precisely on the 5th of January, the day so solemnly appointed under religious sanctions by the lama, the Kalmucks on the east bank of the Volga were seen at the earliest dawn of day assembling by troops and squadrons and in the tumultuous movement of some great morning of battle. Tens of thousands continued moving off the ground at every half hour's interval. Women and children, to the amount of two hundred thousand and upwards, were placed upon wagons or upon camels, and drew off by masses of twenty thousand at once, placed under suitable escorts, and continually swelled in numbers by other outlying bodies of the horde who kept falling in at various distances upon the first and second day's march. From sixty to eighty thousand of those who were the best mounted staid behind the rest of the tribes, with purposes of devastation and plunder more violent than prudence justified or the amiable character of the khan could be supposed to approve. But in this, as in other instances, he was completely overruled by the malignant counsels of Zebek-Dorchi. The first tempest of the desolating fury of the Tartars discharged itself upon their own habitations.

But this, as cutting off all infirm looking backward from the hardships of their march, had been thought so necessary a measure by all the chieftains, that even Oubacha himself was the first to authorize the act by his own example. He seized a torch, previously prepared with materials the most durable as well as combustible, and steadily applied it to the timbers of his own palace. Nothing was saved from the general wreck except the portable part of the domestic utensils and that part of the woodwork which could be applied to the manufacture of the long Tartar lances. This chapter in their memorable day's work being finished, and the whole of their villages throughout a district of ten thousand square miles in one simultaneous blaze, the Tartars waited for further orders.

These, it was intended, should have taken a character of valedictory vengeance, and thus have left behind to the Czarina a dreadful commentary upon the main motives of their flight. It was the purpose of Zebek-Dorchi that all the Russian towns, churches, and buildings of every description should be given up to pillage and destruction, and such treatment applied to the defenseless inhabitants as might naturally be expected from a fierce people already infuriated by the spectacle of their own outrages and by the bloody retaliations which they must necessarily have provoked. This part of the tragedy, however, was happily intercepted by a providential disappointment at the very crisis of departure. It has been mentioned already that the motive for selecting the depth of winter as the season of flight (which otherwise was obviously the very worst possible) had been the impossibility of effecting a junction sufficiently rapid with the tribes on the west of the Volga, in the absence of bridges, unless by a natural bridge of ice. For this one advantage the Kalmuck leaders had consented to aggravate by a thousandfold the calamities inevitable to a rapid flight over boundless tracts of country with women, children, and herds of cattle, — for this one single advantage; and yet after all it was lost. The reason never has been explained satisfactorily; but the fact was such. Some have said

that the signals were not properly concerted for marking the moment of absolute departure; that is, for signifying whether the settled intention of the eastern Kalmucks might not have been suddenly interrupted by adverse intelligence. Others have supposed that the ice might not be equally strong on both sides of the river, and might even be generally insecure for the treading of heavy and heavily laden animals such as camels. But the prevailing notion is, that some accidental movements on the 3d and 4th of January of Russian troops in the neighborhood of the western Kalmucks, though really having no reference to them or their plans, had been construed into certain signs that all was discovered, and that the prudence of the western chieftains, who, from situation, had never been exposed to those intrigues which Zebek-Dorchi had practiced upon the pride of the eastern tribes, now stepped in to save their people from ruin. Be the cause what it might, it is certain that the western Kalmucks were in some way prevented from forming the intended junction with their brethren of the opposite bank; and the result was, that at least one hundred thousand of these Tartars were left behind in Russia. This accident it was which saved their Russian neighbors universally from the desolation which else awaited them. One general massacre and conflagration would assuredly have surprised them, to the utter extermination of their property, their houses, and themselves, had it not been for this disappointment. But the eastern chieftains did not dare to put to hazard the safety of their brethren under the first impulse of the Czarina's vengeance for so dreadful a tragedy; for, as they were well aware of too many circumstances by which she might discover the concurrence of the western people in the general scheme of revolt, they justly feared that she would thence infer their concurrence also in the bloody events which marked its outset.

Little did the western Kalmucks guess what reasons they also had for gratitude on account of an interposition so unexpected, and which, at the moment, they so generally deplored. Could they but have witnessed the thousandth part of the sufferings

which overtook their eastern brethren in the first month of their sad flight, they would have blessed Heaven for their own narrow escape; and yet these sufferings of the first month were but a prelude or foretaste comparatively slight of those which afterwards succeeded.

For now began to unroll the most awful series of calamities, and the most extensive, which is anywhere recorded to have visited the sons and daughters of men. It is possible that the sudden inroads of destroying nations—such as the Huns, or the Avars, or the Mongol[1] Tartars—may have inflicted misery as extensive; but there the misery and the desolation would be sudden, like the flight of volleying lightning. Those who were spared at first would generally be spared to the end; those who perished would perish instantly. It is possible that the French retreat from Moscow may have made some nearer approach to this calamity in duration, though still a feeble and miniature approach, for the French sufferings did not commence in good earnest until about one month from the time of leaving Moscow;[2] and though it is true that afterwards the vials of wrath[3] were emptied upon the devoted army for six or seven weeks in succession, yet what is that to this Kalmuck tragedy, which

[1] The Huns were a Mongol people who crossed the Volga in 375, and drove the Goths beyond the Danube. Under their king, Attila, they overran a great part of Europe in the first half of the fifth century, and even levied a tax upon the Romans. The Avars were of Turanian stock. Their first historical incursion was in the sixth century, when they settled in Dacia, and possessed themselves of an empire reaching from the Elbe to the Black Sea. After Charlemagne's time, they disappeared from history. Under Genghis Khan (1160–1227) and his sons, the Mongol Tartars penetrated Europe as far as the Oder and Danube, subdued the empire of the Chinese, overthrew the Caliph of Bagdad, and destroyed many minor powers.

[2] The army with which Napoleon invaded Russia in the spring of 1812 was of more than six hundred thousand men. He began his retreat from Moscow on the 18th of October. By the middle of November, the army had dwindled to twelve thousand men. In the retreat from Moscow, about ninety thousand had been lost.

[3] The phrase "vials of wrath" is biblical (see Rev. xvi. 1).

lasted for more than as many months? But the main feature of horror, by which the Tartar march was distinguished from the French, lies in the accompaniment of women[1] and children. There were both, it is true, with the French army, but so few as to bear no visible proportion to the total numbers concerned. The French, in short, were merely an army, — a host of professional destroyers, whose regular trade was bloodshed, and whose regular element was danger and suffering; but the Tartars were a nation carrying along with them more than two hundred and fifty thousand women and children, utterly unequal, for the most part, to any contest with the calamities before them. The children of Israel[2] were in the same circumstances as to the accompaniment of their families; but they were released from the pursuit of their enemies in a very early stage of their flight; and their subsequent residence in the desert was not a march, but a continued halt, and under a continued interposition of Heaven for their comfortable support. Earthquakes, again, however comprehensive in their ravages, are shocks of a moment's duration. A much nearer approach made to the wide range and the long duration of the Kalmuck tragedy may have been in a pestilence such as that which visited Athens in the Peloponnesian War,[3] or London in the reign of Charles II.[4] There, also, the martyrs were

[1] DE QUINCEY'S NOTE. — Singular it is, and not generally known, that Grecian women accompanied the anabasis of the younger Cyrus and the subsequent Retreat of the Ten Thousand. Xenophon affirms that there were "many" women in the Greek army — *πολλαι ἦσαν ἑταῖραι ἐν τῷ στρατεύματι*; and in a late stage of that trying expedition it is evident that women were among the survivors.

[2] See Exod. i.–xvii.; Josh. i.–xii.

[3] Against this pestilence, which came to Athens from Egypt, there seemed, says Thucydides (II. xlvii.), "to be no human aid." It fell upon the city in 430 B.C., and carried off not less than one fourth of the people.

[4] "It was about the beginning of September, 1664, that I, among the rest of my neighbors, heard in ordinary discourse that the plague was returned again. . . . It is certain that they [men] died by heaps, and were buried by heaps; that is to say, without account. And if I might believe some people who were more abroad, and more conversant with those things than I, . . .

counted by myriads, and the period of the desolation was counted by months. But, after all, the total amount of destruction was on a smaller scale; and there was this feature of alleviation to the *conscious* pressure of the calamity,—that the misery was withdrawn from public notice into private chambers and hospitals. The siege of Jerusalem by Vespasian and his son,[1] taken in its entire circumstances, comes nearest of all for breadth and depth of suffering, for duration, for the exasperation of the suffering from without by internal feuds, and, finally, for that last most appalling expression of the furnace heat of the anguish in its power to extinguish the natural affections even of maternal love. But, after all, each case had circumstances of romantic misery peculiar to itself,—circumstances without precedent, and (wherever human nature is ennobled by Christianity), it may be confidently hoped, never to be repeated.

The first point to be reached, before any hope of repose could be encouraged, was the river Ural. This was not above three hundred miles from the main point of departure on the Volga, and, if the march thither was to be a forced one and a severe one, it was alleged, on the other hand, that the suffering would be the more brief and transient: one summary exertion, not to be repeated, and all was achieved. Forced the march was, and severe beyond example,—there the forewarning proved correct,—but the promised rest proved a mere phantom of the wilderness, a

I say, if we may believe them, there was not many less buried that first three weeks in September than twenty thousand per week."—DEFOE: *History of the Plague in London*.

[1] "'Those who perished in the siege,' says Josephus, who was without the walls, 'from its commencement till its close, amounted to one million one hundred thousand. Of these the greater proportion were of Jewish blood, though not natives of the place. Having assembled from the whole country for the feast of unleavened bread, they were suddenly hemmed in by the war; so that their confined situation caused at first a pestilential mortality, and afterwards famine also, still more rapid in its effects. . . . Thus was Jerusalem captured in the second year of the reign of Vespasian' (A.D. 70), and under the command of his son Titus."—THE JEWISH WAR (Traill's tr.).

visionary rainbow, which fled before their hopesick eyes, across these interminable solitudes, for seven months of hardship and calamity, without a pause. These sufferings, by their very nature and the circumstances under which they arose, were (like the scenery of the steppes) somewhat monotonous in their coloring and external features. What variety, however, there was, will be most naturally exhibited by tracing historically the successive stages of the general misery exactly as it unfolded itself under the double agency of weakness still increasing from within and hostile pressure from without. Viewed in this manner, under the real order of development, it is remarkable that these sufferings of the Tartars, though under the molding hands of accident, arrange themselves almost with a scenical propriety. They seem combined as with the skill of an artist, the intensity of the misery advancing regularly with the advances of the march, and the stages of the calamity corresponding to the stages of the route; so that, upon raising the curtain which veils the great catastrophe, we behold one vast climax of anguish, towering upwards by regular gradations, as if constructed artificially for picturesque effect,—a result which might not have been surprising, had it been reasonable to anticipate the same rate of speed, and even an accelerated rate, as prevailing through the later stages of the expedition. But it seemed, on the contrary, most reasonable to calculate upon a continual decrement[1] in the rate of motion according to the increasing distance from the headquarters of the pursuing enemy. This calculation, however, was defeated by the extraordinary circumstance that the Russian armies did not begin to close in very fiercely upon the Kalmucks until after they had accomplished a distance of full two thousand miles. One thousand miles farther on, the assaults became even more tumultuous and murderous; and already the great shadows of the Chinese Wall were dimly descried, when the frenzy and *acharnement*[2] of the pursuers and the bloody desperation of the miserable fugitives had reached its

1 Lessening; act of decreasing.

2 Ferocity; bloodthirstiness, as of a beast for prey.

uttermost extremity. Let us briefly rehearse the main stages of the misery, and trace the ascending steps of the tragedy according to the great divisions of the route marked out by the central rivers of Asia.

The first stage, we have already said, was from the Volga to the Ural; the distance about three hundred miles; the time allowed seven days. For the first week, therefore, the rate of marching averaged about forty-three English miles a day. The weather was cold but bracing; and at a more moderate pace this part of the journey might have been accomplished without much distress by a people as hardy as the Kalmucks. As it was, the cattle suffered greatly from overdriving; milk began to fail even for the children; the sheep perished by wholesale; and the children themselves were saved only by the innumerable camels.

The Cossacks who dwelt upon the banks of the Ural were the first among the subjects of Russia to come into collision with the Kalmucks. Great was their surprise at the suddenness of the irruption, and great, also, their consternation; for, according to their settled custom, by far the greater part of their number was absent during the winter months at the fisheries upon the Caspian. Some who were liable to surprise at the most exposed points fled in crowds to the fortress of Koulagina,[1] which was immediately invested and summoned by Oubacha. He had, however, in his train only a few light pieces of artillery; and the Russian commandant at Koulagina, being aware of the hurried circumstances in which the khan was placed, and that he stood upon the very edge, as it were, of a renewed flight, felt encouraged by these considerations to a more obstinate resistance than might else have been advisable with an enemy so little disposed to observe the usages of civilized warfare. The period of his anxiety was not long. On the fifth day of the siege he descried from the walls a succession of Tartar couriers, mounted upon fleet Bactrian camels, crossing the vast plains around the fortress at a furious pace, and riding into the Kalmuck encampment at various points. Great

[1] About a hundred miles above the mouth of the Ural.

agitation appeared immediately to follow. Orders were soon after dispatched in all directions; and it became speedily known that upon a distant flank of the Kalmuck movement a bloody and exterminating battle had been fought the day before, in which one entire tribe of the khan's dependents, numbering not less than nine thousand fighting men, had perished to the last man. This was the *ouloss*, or clan, called *Feka-Zechorr*, between whom and the Cossacks there was a feud of ancient standing. In selecting, therefore, the points of attack, on occasion of the present hasty inroad, the Cossack chiefs were naturally eager so to direct their efforts as to combine with the service of the Empress some gratification to their own party hatreds, more especially as the present was likely to be their final opportunity for revenge, if the Kalmuck evasion [1] should prosper. Having, therefore, concentrated as large a body of Cossack cavalry as circumstances allowed, they attacked the hostile *ouloss* with a precipitation which denied to it all means for communicating with Oubacha; for the necessity of commanding an ample range of pasturage, to meet the necessities of their vast flocks and herds, had separated this *ouloss* from the khan's headquarters by an interval of eighty miles: and thus it was, and not from oversight, that it came to be thrown entirely upon its own resources. These had proved insufficient. Retreat, from the exhausted state of their horses and camels, no less than from the prodigious incumbrances of their live stock, was absolutely out of the question. Quarter was disdained on the one side, and would not have been granted on the other; and thus it had happened that the setting sun of that one day (the thirteenth from the first opening of the revolt) threw his parting rays upon the final agonies of an ancient *ouloss*, stretched upon a bloody field, who on that day's dawning had held and styled themselves an independent nation.

Universal consternation was diffused through the wide borders of the khan's encampment by this disastrous intelligence, not so much on account of the numbers slain, or the total extinction of

[1] Artful escape.

a powerful ally, as because the position of the Cossack force was likely to put to hazard the future advances of the Kalmucks, or at least to retard and hold them in check until the heavier columns of the Russian army should arrive upon their flanks. The siege of Koulagina was instantly raised; and that signal, so fatal to the happiness of the women and their children, once again resounded through the tents, — the signal for flight, and this time for a flight more rapid than ever. About one hundred and fifty miles ahead of their present position there arose a tract of hilly country, forming a sort of margin to the vast, sealike expanse of champaign savannas,[1] steppes, and occasionally of sandy deserts, which stretched away on each side of this margin both eastwards and westwards. Pretty nearly in the center of this hilly range lay a narrow defile, through which passed the nearest and the most practicable route to the river Turgai,[2] the farther bank of which river offered the next great station of security for a general halt. It was the more essential to gain this pass before the Cossacks, inasmuch as not only would the delay in forcing the pass give time to the Russian pursuing columns for combining their attacks and for bringing up their artillery, but also because (even if all enemies in pursuit were thrown out of the question) it was held, by those best acquainted with the difficult and obscure geography of these pathless steppes, that the loss of this one narrow strait amongst the hills would have the effect of throwing them (as their only alternative in a case where so wide a sweep of pasturage was required) upon a circuit of at least five hundred miles extra; besides that, after all, this circuitous route would carry them to the Turgai at a point ill fitted for the passage of their heavy baggage. The defile in the hills, therefore, it was resolved to gain; and yet, unless they moved upon it with the velocity of light cavalry, there was little chance but it would be found preoccupied by the Cossacks.

[1] Both "champaign" and "savanna" describe a vast, open, treeless country.

[2] See Note 3, p. 16.

They, it is true, had suffered greatly in the recent sanguinary action with their enemies; but the excitement of victory, and the intense sympathy with their unexampled triumph, had again swelled their ranks, and would probably act with the force of a vortex to draw in their simple countrymen from the Caspian. The question, therefore, of preoccupation was reduced to a race. The Cossacks were marching upon an oblique line not above fifty miles longer than that which led to the same point from the Kalmuck headquarters before Koulagina; and therefore, without the most furious haste on the part of the Kalmucks, there was not a chance for them, burdened and "trashed"[1] as they were, to anticipate so agile a light cavalry as the Cossacks in seizing this important pass.

Dreadful were the feelings of the poor women on hearing this exposition of the case; for they easily understood that too capital an interest (the *summa rerum*[2]) was now at stake to allow of any regard to minor interests, or what would be considered such in their present circumstances. The dreadful week already passed, their inauguration in misery, was yet fresh in their remembrance. The scars of suffering were impressed not only upon their memories, but upon their very persons and the persons of their children; and they knew that, where no speed had much chance of meeting the cravings of the chieftains, no test would be accepted, short of absolute exhaustion, that as much had been accomplished as could be accomplished. Weseloff, the Russian captive, has recorded the silent wretchedness with which the women and elder boys assisted in drawing the tent ropes. On the 5th of January all had been animation and the joyousness of indefinite expectation: now, on the contrary, a brief but bitter experience had taught them to take an amended calculation of what it was that lay before them.

[1] DE QUINCEY'S NOTE. — This is an expressive word, used by Beaumont and Fletcher in their Bonduca, etc., to describe the case of a person retarded and embarrassed in flight or in pursuit by some incumbrance, whether thing or person, too valuable to be left behind.

[2] The chief of interests or things.

One whole day, and far into the succeeding night, had the renewed flight continued. The sufferings had been greater than before; for the cold had been more intense, and many perished out of the living creatures through every class except only the camels, whose powers of endurance seemed equally adapted to cold and heat. The second morning, however, brought an alleviation to the distress. Snow had begun to fall; and, though not deep at present, it was easily foreseen that it soon would be so, and that, as a halt would in that case become unavoidable, no plan could be better than that of staying where they were, especially as the same cause would check the advance of the Cossacks. Here, then, was the last interval of comfort which gleamed upon the unhappy nation during their whole migration. For ten days the snow continued to fall with little intermission. At the end of that time, keen, bright, frosty weather succeeded: the drifting had ceased. In three days the smooth expanse became firm enough to support the treading of the camels; and the flight was recommenced. But during the halt much domestic comfort had been enjoyed, and, for the last time, universal plenty. The cows and oxen had perished in such vast numbers on the previous marches, that an order was now issued to turn what remained to account by slaughtering the whole, and salting whatever part should be found to exceed the immediate consumption. This measure led to a scene of general banqueting, and even of festivity, amongst all who were not incapacitated for joyous emotions by distress of mind, by grief for the unhappy experience of the few last days, and by anxiety for the too gloomy future. Seventy thousand persons of all ages had already perished, exclusively of the many thousand allies who had been cut down by the Cossack saber; and the losses in reversion[1] were likely to be many more; for rumors began now to arrive from all quarters, by the mounted couriers whom the khan had dispatched to the rear and to each flank as well as in advance, that large masses of the imperial troops were converging from all parts of

[1] "In reversion" is a legal phrase meaning "for the remainder."

Central Asia to the fords of the river Turgai, as the most convenient point for intercepting the flying tribes; and it was already well known that a powerful division was close in their rear, and was retarded only by the numerous artillery which had been judged necessary to support their operations. New motives were thus daily arising for quickening the motions of the wretched Kalmucks and for exhausting those who were previously but too much exhausted.

It was not until the second day of February that the khan's advanced guard came in sight of Ouchim,[1] the defile among the hills of Moulgaldchares,[2] in which they anticipated so bloody an opposition from the Cossacks. A pretty large body of these light cavalry had, in fact, preoccupied the pass by some hours; but the khan, having two great advantages,—namely, a strong body of infantry, who had been conveyed by sections of five on about two hundred camels, and some pieces of light artillery which he had not yet been forced to abandon,—soon began to make a serious impression upon this unsupported detachment, and they would probably at any rate have retired; but, at the very moment when they were making some dispositions in that view, Zebek-Dorchi appeared upon their rear with a body of trained riflemen who had distinguished themselves in the war with Turkey. These men had contrived to crawl unobserved over the cliffs which skirted the ravine, availing themselves of the dry beds of the summer torrents, and other inequalities of the ground, to conceal their movement. Disorder and trepidation ensued instantly in the Cossack files. The khan, who had been waiting with the *élite*[3] of his heavy cavalry, charged furiously upon them. Total overthrow followed to the Cossacks, and a slaughter such as in some measure avenged the recent bloody extermination of their allies, the ancient *ouloss* of Feka-Zechorr. The slight horses of

[1] South of Tobolsk, on the river Irtish.

[2] Mugodschar Mountains, a southern extension of the Urals between the provinces of Uralsk and Turgansk.

[3] Choice body; best part.

the Cossacks were unable to support the weight of heavy Polish dragoons and a body of trained *cameleers* (that is, cuirassiers mounted on camels). Hardy they were, but not strong, nor a match for their antagonists in weight; and their extraordinary efforts through the last few days to gain their present position had greatly diminished their powers for effecting an escape. Very few, in fact, *did* escape; and the bloody day of Ouchim became as memorable amongst the Cossacks as that which, about twenty days before, had signalized the complete annihilation of the Feka-Zechorr.[1]

The road was now open to the river Igritch,[2] and as yet even far beyond it to the Turgai; but how long this state of things would continue was every day more doubtful. Certain intelligence was now received that a large Russian army, well appointed in every arm, was advancing upon the Turgai under the command of General Traubenberg. This officer was to be joined on his route by ten thousand Bashkirs and pretty nearly the same amount of Kirghises,—both hereditary enemies of the Kalmucks, both exasperated to a point of madness by the bloody trophies which Oubacha and Momotbacha had in late years won from such of their compatriots as served under the Sultan. The Czarina's yoke these wild nations bore with submissive patience, but not the

[1] DE QUINCEY'S NOTE.—There was another *ouloss* equally strong with that of Feka-Zechorr, viz., that of Erketunn, under the government of Assarcho and Machi, whom some obligations of treaty or other hidden motives drew into the general conspiracy of revolt. But fortunately the two chieftains found means to assure the Governor of Astrachan, on the first outbreak of the insurrection, that their real wishes were for maintaining the old connection with Russia. The Cossacks, therefore, to whom the pursuit was intrusted, had instructions to act cautiously and according to circumstances on coming up with them. The result was, through the prudent management of Assarcho, that the clan, without compromising their pride or independence, made such moderate submissions as satisfied the Cossacks; and eventually both chiefs and people received from the Czarina the rewards and honors of exemplary fidelity.

[2] A river near the center of the province of Turgai which receives the Turgai River, and loses itself in the Karakum Desert north of the Aral Sea.

hands by which it had been imposed; and accordingly, catching with eagerness at the present occasion offered to their vengeance, they sent an assurance to the Czarina of their perfect obedience to her commands, and at the same time a message significantly declaring in what spirit they meant to execute them, namely, "that they would not trouble her Majesty with prisoners."

Here, then, arose, as before with the Cossacks, a race for the Kalmucks with the regular armies of Russia, and concurrently with nations as fierce and semihumanized as themselves; besides that they were stung into threefold activity by the furies of mortified pride and military abasement under the eyes of the Turkish Sultan. The forces, and more especially the artillery, of Russia, were far too overwhelming to permit the thought of a regular opposition in pitched battles, even with a less dilapidated state of their resources than they could reasonably expect at the period of their arrival on the Turgai. In their speed lay their only hope,—in strength of foot, as before, and not in strength of arm. Onward, therefore, the Kalmucks pressed, marking the lines of their wide-extending march over the sad solitudes of the steppes by a never-ending chain of corpses. The old and the young, the sick man on his couch, the mother with her baby,—all were left behind. Sights such as these, with the many rueful aggravations incident to the helpless condition of infancy,—of disease and of female weakness abandoned to the wolves amidst a howling wilderness,—continued to track their course through a space of full two thousand miles; for so much at the least it was likely to prove, including the circuits to which they were often compelled by rivers or hostile tribes, from the point of starting on the Volga until they could reach their destined halting ground on the east bank of the Turgai. For the first seven weeks of this march their sufferings had been imbittered by the excessive severity of the cold; and every night—so long as wood was to be had for fires, either from the lading of the camels, or from the desperate sacrifice of their baggage wagons, or (as occasionally happened) from the forests which skirted the banks of the many

rivers which crossed their path — no spectacle was more frequent than that of a circle, composed of men, women, and children, gathered by hundreds round a central fire, all dead and stiff at the return of morning light. Myriads[1] were left behind from pure exhaustion, of whom none had a chance, under the combined evils which beset them, of surviving through the next twenty-four hours. Frost, however, and snow at length ceased to persecute; the vast extent of the march at length brought them into more genial latitudes; and the unusual duration of the march was gradually bringing them into the more genial seasons of the year. Two thousand miles had at least been traversed; February, March, April, were gone; the balmy month of May had opened; vernal sights and sounds came from every side to comfort the heart-weary travelers; and at last, in the latter end of May, they crossed the Turgai, and took up a position where they hoped to find liberty to repose themselves for many weeks in comfort as well as in security, and to draw such supplies from the fertile neighborhood as might restore their shattered forces to a condition for executing, with less of wreck and ruin, the large remainder of the journey.

Yes, it was true that two thousand miles of wandering had been completed, but in a period of nearly five months, and with the terrific sacrifice of at least two hundred and fifty thousand souls, to say nothing of herds and flocks past all reckoning. These had all perished, — ox, cow, horse, mule, ass, sheep, or goat: not one survived, — only the camels. These arid and adust[2] creatures, looking like the mummies of some antediluvian animals, without the affections or sensibilities of flesh and blood, — these only still erected their speaking eyes to the eastern heavens, and had to all appearance come out from this long tempest of trial unscathed and unharmed. The khan, knowing how much he was individually answerable for the misery which had been sustained, must have wept tears even more bitter than those of Xerxes when he threw his eyes over the myriads whom he had

[1] Many. [2] Looking as if scorched.

assembled;[1] for the tears of Xerxes were unmingled with compunction. Whatever amends were in his power he resolved to make by sacrifices to the general good of all personal regards; and accordingly, even at this point of their advance, he once more deliberately brought under review the whole question of the revolt. The question was formally debated before the council, whether, even at this point, they should untread their steps, and, throwing themselves upon the Czarina's mercy, return to their old allegiance. In that case, Oubacha professed himself willing to become the scapegoat[2] for the general transgression. This, he argued, was no fantastic scheme, but even easy of accomplishment; for the unlimited and sacred power of the khan, so well known to the Empress, made it absolutely iniquitous to attribute any separate responsibility to the people. Upon the khan rested the guilt; upon the khan would descend the imperial vengeance. This proposal was applauded for its generosity, but was energetically opposed by Zebek-Dorchi. Were they to lose the whole journey of two thousand miles? Was their misery to perish without fruit? True it was that they had yet reached only the halfway house; but in that respect the motives were evenly balanced for retreat or for advance. Either way they would have pretty nearly the same distance to traverse, but with this difference,—that, forwards, their route lay through lands comparatively fertile; backwards through a blasted wilderness, rich only in memorial of their sorrow, and hideous to Kalmuck eyes by the trophies of their calamity. Besides, though the Empress

[1] "When he saw all the Hellespont crowded with ships, and all the points and plains of Abydos filled with men, then Xerxes thought himself happy. But afterwards he wept. Now Artabanus his uncle, who had at first openly opposed Xerxes' expedition against Greece,—this man, when he beheld Xerxes in tears, said, 'How differently you do, O King, from a little while ago: you weep because you are happy.' And the King answered, 'It came upon me as I looked down over these men, and thought how short is the life of man; for of all here collected no one will be alive a hundred years hence.'" —HERODOTUS, VII. xlv., xlvi.

[2] See Lev. xvi.

might accept an excuse for the past, would she the less forbear to suspect for the future? The Czarina's *pardon* they might obtain; but could they ever hope to recover her *confidence?* Doubtless there would now be a standing presumption against them, an immortal ground of jealousy; and a jealous government would be but another name for a harsh one. Finally, whatever motives there ever had been for the revolt surely remained unimpaired by anything that had occurred. In reality the revolt was, after all, no revolt, but, strictly speaking, a return to their old allegiance; since not above one hundred and fifty years ago, namely, in the year 1616, their ancestors had revolted from the Emperor of China. They had now tried both governments; and for them China was the land of promise, and Russia the house of bondage.

Spite, however, of all that Zebek could say or do, the yearning of the people was strongly in behalf of the khan's proposal,—the pardon of their prince, they persuaded themselves, would be readily conceded by the Empress; and there is little doubt that they would at this time have thrown themselves gladly upon the imperial mercy,—when suddenly all was defeated by the arrival of two envoys from Traubenberg. This general had reached the fortress of Orsk,[1] after a very painful march, on the 12th of April; thence he set forwards towards Oriembourg,[2] which he reached upon the 1st of June, having been joined on his route, at various times through the month of May, by the Kirghises and a corps of ten thousand Bashkirs. From Oriembourg he sent forward his official offers to the khan, which were harsh and peremptory, holding out no specific stipulations as to pardon or impunity, and exacting unconditional submission as the preliminary price of any cessation from military operations. The personal character of Traubenberg, which was anything but energetic, and the condition of his army, disorganized in a great measure by the length and severity of the march, made it proba-

[1] A fortress upon the frontier of Russia.

[2] Fort Orenburg is east of the center of Turgai, and capital of a province of the same name.

ble, that, with a little time for negotiation, a more conciliatory tone would have been assumed. But, unhappily for all parties, sinister events occurred in the meantime, such as effectually put an end to every hope of the kind.

The two envoys sent forward by Traubenberg had reported to this officer that a distance of only ten days' march lay between his own headquarters and those of the khan. Upon this fact transpiring, the Kirghises, by their prince Nourali, and the Bashkirs, entreated the Russian general to advance without delay. Once having placed his cannon in position, so as to command the Kalmuck camp, the fate of the rebel khan and his people would be in his own hands, and they would themselves form his advanced guard. Traubenberg, however,—*why* has not been certainly explained,—refused to march, grounding his refusal upon the condition of his army and their absolute need of refreshment. Long and fierce was the altercation; but at length, seeing no chance of prevailing, and dreading above all other events the escape of their detested enemy, the ferocious Bashkirs went off in a body by forced marches. In six days they reached the Turgai, crossed by swimming their horses, and fell upon the Kalmucks, who were dispersed for many a league in search of food or provender for their camels. The first day's action was one vast succession of independent skirmishes diffused over a field of thirty to forty miles in extent; one party often breaking up into three or four, and again (according to the accidents of ground) three or four blending into one; flight and pursuit, rescue and total overthrow, going on simultaneously, under all varieties of form, in all quarters of the plain. The Bashkirs had found themselves obliged, by the scattered state of the Kalmucks, to split up into innumerable sections; and thus, for some hours, it had been impossible for the most practiced eye to collect the general tendency of the day's fortune. Both the khan and Zebek-Dorchi were at one moment made prisoners, and more than once in imminent danger of being cut down; but at length Zebek succeeded in rallying a strong column of infantry, which,

with the support of the camel corps on each flank, compelled the Bashkirs to retreat. Clouds, however, of these wild cavalry, continued to arrive through the next two days and nights, followed or accompanied by the Kirghises. These being viewed as the advanced parties of Traubenberg's army, the Kalmuck chieftains saw no hope of safety but in flight; and in this way it happened that a retreat which had so recently been brought to a pause, was resumed at the very moment when the unhappy fugitives were anticipating a deep repose, without further molestation, the whole summer through.

It seemed as though every variety of wretchedness were predestined to the Kalmucks, and as if their sufferings were incomplete unless they were rounded and matured by all that the most dreadful agencies of summer's heat could superadd to those of frost and winter. To this sequel of their story we shall immediately revert, after first noticing a little romantic episode which occurred at this point between Oubacha and his unprincipled cousin Zebek-Dorchi.

There was, at the time of the Kalmuck flight from the Volga, a Russian gentleman of some rank at the court of the khan, whom for political reasons it was thought necessary to carry along with them as a captive. For some weeks his confinement had been very strict, and in one or two instances cruel; but as the increasing distance was continually diminishing the chances of escape, and perhaps, also, as the misery of the guards gradually withdrew their attention from all minor interests to their own personal sufferings, the vigilance of the custody grew more and more relaxed, until at length, upon a petition to the khan, Mr. Weseloff was formally restored to liberty; and it was understood that he might use his liberty in whatever way he chose, even for returning to Russia, if that should be his wish. Accordingly, he was making active preparations for his journey to St. Petersburg, when it occurred to Zebek-Dorchi that not improbably, in some of the battles which were then anticipated with Traubenberg, it might happen to them to lose some prisoner of rank, in which

case the Russian Weseloff would be a pledge in their hands for negotiating an exchange. Upon this plea, to his own severe affliction, the Russian was detained until the further pleasure of the khan. The khan's name, indeed, was used through the whole affair, but, as it seemed, with so little concurrence on his part, that when Weseloff in a private audience humbly remonstrated upon the injustice done him, and the cruelty of thus sporting with his feelings by setting him at liberty, and, as it were, tempting him into dreams of home and restored happiness, only for the purpose of blighting them, the good-natured prince disclaimed all participation in the affair, and went so far in proving his sincerity as even to give him permission to effect his escape; and, as a ready means of commencing it without raising suspicion, the khan mentioned to Mr. Weseloff that he had just then received a message from the hetman [1] of the Bashkirs, soliciting a private interview on the banks of the Turgai at a spot pointed out. That interview was arranged for the coming night; and Mr. Weseloff might go in the khan's suite,[2] which on either side was not to exceed three persons. Weseloff was a prudent man, acquainted with the world, and he read treachery in the very outline of this scheme as stated by the khan,—treachery against the khan's person. He mused a little, and then communicated so much of his suspicions to the khan as might put him on his guard; but, upon further consideration, he begged leave to decline the honor of accompanying the khan. The fact was, that three Kalmucks, who had strong motives for returning to their countrymen on the west bank of the Volga, guessing the intentions of Weseloff, had offered to join him in his escape. These men the khan would probably find himself obliged to countenance in their project; so that it became a point of honor with Weseloff to conceal their intentions, and therefore to accomplish the evasion from the camp (of which the first step only would be hazardous) without risking the notice of the khan.

The district in which they were now encamped abounded

[1] Chief. [2] Company of followers; train.

through many hundred miles with wild horses of a docile and beautiful breed. Each of the four fugitives had caught from seven to ten of these spirited creatures in the course of the last few days. This raised no suspicion; for the rest of the Kalmucks had been making the same sort of provision against the coming toils of their remaining route to China. These horses were secured by halters, and hidden about dusk in the thickets which lined the margin of the river. To these thickets, about ten at night, the four fugitives repaired. They took a circuitous path which drew them as little as possible within danger of challenge from any of the outposts or of the patrols which had been established on the quarters where the Bashkirs lay, and in three quarters of an hour they reached the rendezvous. The moon had now risen; the horses were unfastened; and they were in the act of mounting, when the deep silence of the woods was disturbed by a violent uproar and the clashing of arms. Weseloff fancied that he heard the voice of the khan shouting for assistance. He remembered the communication made by that prince in the morning, and, requesting his companions to support him, he rode off in the direction of the sound. A very short distance brought him to an open glade in the wood, where he beheld four men contending with a party of at least nine or ten. Two of the four were dismounted at the very instant of Weseloff's arrival, One of these he recognized almost certainly as the khan, who was fighting hand to hand, but at great disadvantage, with two of the adverse horsemen. Seeing that no time was to be lost, Weseloff fired, and brought down one of the two. His companions discharged their carbines at the same moment; and then all rushed simultaneously into the little open area. The thundering sound of about thirty horses, all rushing at once into a narrow space, gave the impression that a whole troop of cavalry was coming down upon the assailants, who accordingly wheeled about and fled with one impulse. Weseloff advanced to the dismounted cavalier, who, as he expected, proved to be the khan. The man whom Weseloff had shot was lying dead; and both were shocked,

though Weseloff at least was not surprised, on stooping down, and scrutinizing his features, to recognize a well-known confidential servant of Zebek-Dorchi. Nothing was said by either party. The khan rode off, escorted by Weseloff and his companions; and for some time a dead silence prevailed. The situation of Weseloff was delicate and critical. To leave the khan at this point was probably to cancel their recent services; for he might be again crossed on his path, and again attacked by the very party from whom he had just been delivered. Yet, on the other hand, to return to the camp was to endanger the chances of accomplishing the escape. The khan, also, was apparently revolving all this in his mind; for at length he broke silence, and said, "I comprehend your situation, and under other circumstances I might feel it my duty to detain your companions; but it would ill become me to do so after the important service you have just rendered me. Let us turn a little to the left. There, where you see the watchfire, is an outpost. Attend me so far. I am then safe. You may turn, and pursue your enterprise; for the circumstances under which you will appear as my escort are sufficient to shield you from all suspicion for the present. I regret having no better means at my disposal for testifying my gratitude. But tell me, before we part, was it accident only which led you to my rescue? or had you acquired any knowledge of the plot by which I was decoyed into this snare?" Weseloff answered very candidly that mere accident had brought him to the spot at which he heard the uproar; but that *having* heard it, and connecting it with the khan's communication of the morning, he had then designedly gone after the sound in a way which he certainly should not have done at so critical a moment, unless in the expectation of finding the khan assaulted by assassins. A few minutes after, they reached the outpost at which it became safe to leave the Tartar chieftain; and immediately the four fugitives commenced a flight which is, perhaps, without a parallel in the annals of traveling. Each of them led six or seven horses besides the one he rode; and by shifting from one to the other, like the ancient

desultors[1] of the Roman circus, so as never to burden the same horse for more than half an hour at a time, they continued to advance at the rate of two hundred miles in the twenty-four hours for three days consecutively. After that time, considering themselves beyond pursuit, they proceeded less rapidly, though still with a velocity which staggered the belief of Weseloff's friends in after years. He was, however, a man of high principle, and always adhered firmly to the details of his printed report. One of the circumstances there stated is, that they continued to pursue the route by which the Kalmucks had fled, never for an instant finding any difficulty in tracing it by the skeletons and other memorials of their calamities. In particular, he mentions vast heaps of money as part of the valuable property which it had been necessary to sacrifice. These heaps were found lying still untouched in the deserts. From these, Weseloff and his companions took as much as they could conveniently carry; and this it was, with the price of their beautiful horses (which they afterwards sold at one of the Russian military settlements for about fifteen pounds apiece), which eventually enabled them to pursue their journey in Russia. This journey, as regarded Weseloff in particular, was closed by a tragical catastrophe. He was at that time young, and the only child of a doting mother. Her affliction under the violent abduction of her son had been excessive, and probably had undermined her constitution. Still she had supported it. Weseloff, giving way to the natural impulses of his filial affection, had imprudently posted through Russia to his mother's house without warning of his approach. He rushed precipitately into her presence; and she, who had stood the shocks of sorrow, was found unequal to the shock of joy too sudden and too acute. She died upon the spot.

We now revert to the final scenes of the Kalmuck flight. These it would be useless to pursue circumstantially through the whole two thousand miles of suffering which remained; for the

[1] Vaulters, or circus riders who leaped from horse to horse without slacking speed.

character of that suffering was even more monotonous than on the former half of the flight, but also more severe. Its main elements were excessive heat, with the accompaniments of famine and thirst, but aggravated at every step by the murderous attacks of their cruel enemies, the Bashkirs and the Kirghises.

These people, "more fell[1] than anguish, hunger, or the sea," stuck to the unhappy Kalmucks like a swarm of enraged hornets; and very often, whilst *they* were attacking them in the rear, their advanced parties and flanks were attacked with almost equal fury by the people of the country which they were traversing; and with good reason, since the law of self-preservation had now obliged the fugitive Tartars to plunder provisions and to forage wherever they passed. In this respect their condition was a constant oscillation[2] of wretchedness; for sometimes, pressed by grinding famine, they took a circuit of perhaps a hundred miles in order to strike into a land rich in the comforts of life. But in such a land they were sure to find a crowded population, of which every arm was raised in unrelenting hostility, with all the advantages of local knowledge, and with constant preoccupation of all the defensible positions, mountain passes, or bridges. Sometimes, again, wearied out with this mode of suffering, they took a circuit of perhaps a hundred miles in order to strike into a land with few or no inhabitants; but in such a land they were sure to meet absolute starvation. Then, again, whether with or without this plague of starvation, whether with or without this plague of hostility in front, whatever might be the "fierce varieties" of their misery in this respect, no rest ever came to their unhappy rear; *post equitem sedet atra cura;*[3] it was a torment like the undying worm[4] of conscience, and upon the whole it presented a spectacle altogether unprecedented in the history of mankind.

[1] Fierce. The quotation is from Othello, act v. sc. 2.

[2] A swinging, like that of a pendulum.

[3] "Behind the horseman sits dark care." The quotation is from Horace, Ode iii. 37.

[4] Means here "gnawing, remorse." De Quincey may have had Shake-

Private and personal malignity is not unfrequently immortal; but rare indeed is it to find the same pertinacity of malice in a nation. And what imbittered the interest was, that the malice was reciprocal. Thus far the parties met upon equal terms; but that equality only sharpened the sense of their dire inequality as to other circumstances. The Bashkirs were ready to fight "from morn to dewy eve."[1] The Kalmucks, on the contrary, were always obliged to run. Was it *from* their enemies as creatures whom they feared? No, but *towards* their friends,—towards that final haven of China,—as what was hourly implored by their wives and the tears of their children. But, though they fled unwillingly, too often they fled in vain, being unwillingly recalled. There lay the torment. Every day the Bashkirs fell upon them; every day the same unprofitable battle was renewed. As a matter of course, the Kalmucks recalled part of their advanced guard to fight them. Every day the battle raged for hours, and uniformly with the same result; for, no sooner did the Bashkirs find themselves too heavily pressed, and that the Kalmuck march had been retarded by some hours, than they retired into the boundless deserts, where all pursuit was hopeless. But if the Kalmucks resolved to press forward, regardless of their enemies, in that case their attacks became so fierce and overwhelming that the general safety seemed likely to be brought into question; nor could any effectual remedy be applied to the case, even for each separate day, except by a most embarrassing halt and by countermarches that to men in their circumstances were almost worse than death. It will not be surprising that the irritation of such a systematic persecution, superadded to a previous and hereditary hatred, and accompanied by the stinging consciousness of utter impotence as regarded all effectual vengeance, should gradually have inflamed the Kalmuck animosity into the wildest expression of downright madness and frenzy. Indeed, long before the

speare's sentence in Richard III. in mind,—"The *worm* of conscience still begnaw thy soul!"

[1] See Paradise Lost, I. 743.

frontiers of China were approached, the hostility of both sides had assumed the appearance much more of a warfare amongst wild beasts than amongst creatures acknowledging the restraints of reason or the claims of a common nature. The spectacle became too atrocious: it was that of a host of lunatics pursued by a host of fiends.

On a fine morning in early autumn of the year 1771, Kien Long, the Emperor of China, was pursuing his amusements in a wild frontier district lying on the outside of the Great Wall. For many hundred square leagues the country was desolate of inhabitants, but rich in woods of ancient growth, and overrun with game of every description. In a central spot of this solitary region the Emperor had built a gorgeous hunting lodge, to which he resorted annually for recreation, and relief from the cares of government. Led onwards in pursuit of game, he had rambled to a distance of two hundred miles or more from this lodge, followed at a little distance by a sufficient military escort, and every night pitching his tent in a different situation, until at length he had arrived on the very margin of the vast central deserts of Asia.[1] Here he was standing, by accident, at an opening of his pavilion, enjoying the morning sunshine, when suddenly to the westward there arose a vast, cloudy vapor, which by degrees expanded, mounted, and seemed to be slowly diffusing itself over the whole face of the heavens. By and by this vast sheet of mist began to thicken towards the horizon, and to roll forward in billowy volumes. The Emperor's suite assembled from all quarters; the silver trumpets were sounded in the rear; and from all the glades and forest avenues began to trot forward towards the pavilion the yagers[2]—half cavalry, half huntsmen—who

[1] De Quincey's Note.—All the circumstances are learned from a long state paper upon the subject of this Kalmuck migration, drawn up in the Chinese language by the Emperor himself. Parts of this paper have been translated by the Jesuit missionaries. The Emperor states the whole motives of his conduct and the chief incidents at great length.

[2] De Quincey's use and definition of the word would lead one to suppose

composed the imperial escort. Conjecture was on the stretch to divine the cause of this phenomenon; and the interest continually increased in proportion as simple curiosity gradually deepened into the anxiety of uncertain danger. At first it had been imagined that some vast troops of deer or other wild animals of the chase had been disturbed in their forest haunts by the Emperor's movements, or possibly by wild beasts prowling for prey, and might be fetching a compass[1] by way of reëntering the forest grounds at some remoter points secure from molestation. But this conjecture was dissipated by the slow increase of the cloud and the steadiness of its motion. In the course of two hours the vast phenomenon had advanced to a point which was judged to be within five miles of the spectators; though all calculations of distance were difficult, and often fallacious, when applied to the endless expanses of the Tartar deserts. Through the next hour, during which the gentle morning breeze had a little freshened, the dusty vapor had developed itself far and wide into the appearance of huge aërial draperies, hanging in mighty volumes from the sky to the earth; and at particular points, where the eddies of the breeze acted upon the pendulous[2] skirts of these aërial curtains, rents were perceived, sometimes taking the form of regular arches, portals, and windows, through which began dimly to gleam the heads of camels "indorsed"[3] with human beings, and at intervals the moving of men and horses in tumultuous array, and then through other openings, or vistas, at far-distant points, the flashing of polished arms. But sometimes, as the wind slackened or died away, all those openings, of whatever form, in the cloudy pall, would slowly close, and for a time the whole

it Chinese. It is, however, from the German *jäger* ("huntsman"), and it describes a light infantry, made up of foresters, which was formerly used in German armies.

[1] "Fetching a compass" is an old English phrase for "making a circuit."

[2] Hanging; swinging.

[3] De Quincey's Note.—"And elephants indorsed with towers."—Milton: *Paradise Regained*, III. 329.

pageant was shut up from view; although the growing din, the clamors, the shrieks and groans ascending from infuriated myriads, reported, in a language not to be misunderstood, what was going on behind the cloudy screen.

It was, in fact, the Kalmuck host, now in the last extremities of their exhaustion, and very fast approaching to that final stage of privation and intense misery beyond which few or none could have lived, but also, happily for themselves, fast approaching (in a literal sense) that final stage of their long pilgrimage at which they would meet hospitality on a scale of royal magnificence, and full protection from their enemies. These enemies, however, as yet, still were hanging on their rear as fiercely as ever, though this day was destined to be the last of their hideous persecution. The khan had, in fact, sent forward couriers with all the requisite statements and petitions, addressed to the Emperor of China. These had been duly received, and preparations made in consequence to welcome the Kalmucks with the most paternal benevolence. But as these couriers had been dispatched from the Turgai at the moment of arrival thither, and before the advance of Traubenberg had made it necessary for the khan to order a hasty renewal of the flight, the Emperor had not looked for their arrival on their frontier until full three months after the present time. The khan had, indeed, expressly notified his intention to pass the summer heats on the banks of the Turgai, and to recommence his retreat about the beginning of September. The subsequent change of plan, being unknown to Kien Long, left him for some time in doubt as to the true interpretation to be put upon this mighty apparition in the desert; but at length the savage clamors of hostile fury and the clangor of weapons unveiled to the Emperor the true nature of those unexpected calamities which had so prematurely precipitated the Kalmuck measure.

Apprehending the real state of affairs, the Emperor instantly perceived that the first act of his fatherly care for these erring children (as he esteemed them), now returning to their ancient

obedience, must be to deliver them from their pursuers. And this was less difficult than might have been supposed. Not many miles in the rear was a body of well-appointed cavalry, with a strong detachment of artillery, who always attended the Emperor's motions. These were hastily summoned. Meantime it occurred to the train of courtiers that some danger might arise to the Emperor's person from the proximity of a lawless enemy; and accordingly he was induced to retire a little to the rear. It soon appeared, however, to those who watched the vapory shroud in the desert, that its motion was not such as would argue the direction of the march to be exactly upon the pavilion, but rather in a diagonal line, making an angle of full forty-five degrees with that line in which the imperial cortége[1] had been standing, and therefore with a distance continually increasing. Those who knew the country judged that the Kalmucks were making for a large fresh-water lake about seven or eight miles distant. They were right; and to that point the imperial cavalry was ordered up; and it was precisely in that spot, and about three hours after, and at noonday, on the 8th of September, that the great exodus of the Kalmuck Tartars was brought to a final close, and with a scene of such memorable and hellish fury as formed an appropriate winding up to an expedition in all its parts and details so awfully disastrous. The Emperor was not personally present, or at least he saw whatever he *did* see from too great a distance to discriminate its individual features; but he records in his written memorial the report made to him of this scene by some of his own officers.

The Lake of Tengis,[2] near the frightful Desert of Kobi, lay in a hollow amongst hills of a moderate height, ranging generally from two to three thousand feet high. About eleven o'clock in the forenoon the Chinese cavalry reached the summit of a road which led through a cradle-like dip in the mountains right down upon the margin of the lake. From this pass, elevated about

[1] Company of followers; train of attendants.

[2] Lake Balkash.

two thousand feet above the level of the water, they continued to descend, by a very winding and difficult road, for an hour and a half; and during the whole of this descent they were compelled to be inactive spectators of the fiendish spectacle below. The Kalmucks, reduced by this time from about six hundred thousand souls to two hundred thousand, and after enduring for two months and a half the miseries we have previously described,—outrageous heat, famine, and the destroying scimiter of the Kirghises and the Bashkirs,—had for the last ten days been traversing a hideous desert, where no vestiges were seen of vegetation, and no drop of water could be found. Camels and men were already so overladen that it was a mere impossibility that they should carry a tolerable sufficiency for the passage of this frightful wilderness. On the eighth day the wretched daily allowance, which had been continually diminishing, failed entirely; and thus, for two days of insupportable fatigue, the horrors of thirst had been carried to the fiercest extremity. Upon this last morning, at the sight of the hills and the forest scenery, which announced to those who acted as guides the neighborhood of the Lake of Tengis, all the people rushed along with maddening eagerness to the anticipated solace. The day grew hotter and hotter, the people more and more exhausted; and gradually, in the general rush forwards to the lake, all discipline and command were lost: all attempts to preserve a rearguard were neglected. The wild Bashkirs rode in amongst the encumbered people, and slaughtered them by wholesale and almost without resistance. Screams and tumultuous shouts proclaimed the progress of the massacre; but none heeded, none halted: all alike, pauper or noble, continued to rush on with maniacal haste to the waters,—all with faces blackened by the heat preying upon the liver, and with tongue drooping from the mouth. The cruel Bashkir was affected by the same misery, and manifested the same symptoms of his misery, as the wretched Kalmuck. The murderer was oftentimes in the same frantic misery as his murdered victim. Many, indeed (an ordinary effect of thirst), in both nations, had

become lunatic; and in this state, whilst mere multitude and condensation of bodies alone opposed any check to the destroying scimiter and the trampling hoof, the lake was reached; and to that the whole vast body of enemies rushed, and together continued to rush, forgetful of all things at that moment but of one almighty instinct. This absorption of the thoughts in one maddening appetite lasted for a single minute; but in the next arose the final scene of parting vengeance. Far and wide the waters of the solitary lake were instantly dyed red with blood and gore. Here rode a party of savage Bashkirs, hewing off heads as fast as the swaths fall before the mower's scythe; there stood unarmed Kalmucks in a death grapple with their detested foes, both up to the middle in water, and oftentimes both sinking together below the surface, from weakness or from struggles, and perishing in each other's arms. Did the Bashkirs at any point collect into a cluster for the sake of giving impetus[1] to the assault, thither were the camels driven in fiercely by those who rode them, generally women or boys; and even these quiet creatures were forced into a share in this carnival of murder by trampling down as many as they could strike prostrate with the lash of their fore legs. Every moment the water grew more polluted; and yet every moment fresh myriads came up to the lake, and rushed in, not able to resist their frantic thirst, and swallowing large draughts of water visibly contaminated with the blood of their slaughtered compatriots. Wheresoever the lake was shallow enough to allow of men raising their heads above the water, there, for scores of acres, were to be seen all forms of ghastly fear, of agonizing struggle, of spasm, of convulsion, of mortal conflict,—death, and the fear of death; revenge, and the lunacy of revenge; hatred, and the frenzy of hatred; until the neutral spectators, of whom there were not a few, now descending the eastern side of the lake, at length averted their eyes in horror. This horror, which seemed incapable of further addition, was, however, increased by an unexpected incident. The Bashkirs, beginning to perceive here and there

[1] Energy of motion.

the approach of the Chinese cavalry, felt it prudent, wheresoever they were sufficiently at leisure from the passions of the murderous scene, to gather into bodies. This was noticed by the governor of a small Chinese fort built upon an eminence above the lake; and immediately he threw in a broadside, which spread havoc amongst the Bashkir tribe. As often as the Bashkirs collected into "*globes*" and "*turms*" [1] as their only means of meeting the long line of descending Chinese cavalry, so often did the Chinese governor of the fort pour in his exterminating broadside; until at length the lake, at the lower end, became one vast seething caldron of human bloodshed and carnage. The Chinese cavalry had reached the foot of the hills; the Bashkirs, attentive to *their* movements, had formed; skirmishes had been fought; and with a quick sense that the contest was henceforward rapidly becoming hopeless, the Bashkirs and Kirghises began to retire. The pursuit was not as vigorous as the Kalmuck hatred would have desired; but at the same time the very gloomiest hatred could not but find in their own dreadful experience of the Asiatic deserts, and in the certainty that these wretched Bashkirs had to repeat that same experience a second time, for thousands of miles, as the price exacted by a retributory [2] Providence for their vindictive cruelty,—not the very gloomiest of the Kalmucks, or the least reflecting, but found in all this a retaliatory chastisement more complete and absolute than any which their swords and lances could have obtained, or human vengeance could have devised.

Here ends the tale of the Kalmuck wanderings in the desert; for any subsequent marches which awaited them were neither long nor painful. Every possible alleviation and refreshment for their exhausted bodies had been already provided by Kien Long with the most princely munificence; and lands of great fertility were

[1] "Globe" is from the Latin *globus* ("a ball, throng, crowd, company"). "Turm" is from the Latin *turma* ("a troop"). De Quincey doubtless italicized with quotation marks because such use of the words is Miltonic.

[2] Conferring punishment, or reward, according to desert.

immediately assigned to them in ample extent along the river Ily,[1] not very far from the point at which they had first emerged from the wilderness of Kobi. But the beneficent attention of the Chinese Emperor may be best stated in his own words, as translated into French by one of the Jesuit missionaries: "La nation des Torgotes (*savoir les Kalmuques*) arriva à Ily, toute *delabrée*, n'ayant ni de quoi vivre, ni de quoi se vêtir. Je l'avais prévu; et j'avais ordonné de faire en tout genre les provisions nécessaires pour pouvoir les secourir promptement; c'est ce qui a été exécuté. On a fait la division des terres; et on a assigné à chaque famille une portion suffisante pour pouvoir servir à son entretien, soit en la cultivant, soit en y nourissant des bestiaux. On a donné à chaque particulier des étoffes pour l'habiller, des grains pour se nourrir pendant l'espace d'une année, des ustensiles pour le ménage et d'autres choses nécessaires: et outre cela plusieurs onces d'argent, pour se pourvoir de ce qu'on aurait pu oublier. On a designé des lieux particuliers, fertiles en pâturages; et on leur a donné des bœufs, moutons, etc., pour qu'ils pussent dans la suite travailler par eux-mêmes à leur entretien et à leur bienêtre."[2]

These are the words of the Emperor himself, speaking in his

[1] A river flowing northwest into Lake Balkash, Denges, or Tengis, on the frontier of Siberia.

[2] The nation of the Torgouths, namely, the Kalmucks, came to the Ily wholly shattered, having nothing upon which to live, nor anything to put on. I had foreseen this, and I had ordered the making of every sort of preparation for their immediate relief; which had been done. A distribution of lands was made; and each family was given a portion sufficient for its keeping, whether by cultivation or by feeding cattle. There was given to each individual, stuff for his clothing, grain to keep him for the space of a year, utensils for the household, and other things necessary, and, besides this, several ounces of silver for his use upon anything which had been forgotten. Special places fertile for pasture were marked out for them; and cattle and sheep were given them in order that they might in the future work for their own support and well being.

"This paragraph," says Professor Masson, "is the French translation of a note of Kien Long, which De Quincey took from the book of the German traveler Bergmann."

own person of his own paternal cares; but another Chinese, treating the same subject, records the munificence of this prince in terms which proclaim still more forcibly the disinterested generosity which prompted, and the delicate considerateness which conducted, this extensive bounty. He has been speaking of the Kalmucks, and he goes on thus: "Lorsqu'ils arrivèrent sur nos frontières (au nombre de plusieurs centaines de mille, quoique la fatigue extrême, la faim, la soif, et toutes les autres incommodités inséparables d'une très-longue et très pénible route en eussent fait périr presque autant), ils étaient réduits à la dernière misère; ils manquaient de tout. Il [l'empereur, Kien Long] leur fit préparer des logemens conformes à leur manière de vivre; il leur fit distribuer des aliments et des habits; il leur fit donner des bœufs, des moutons, et des ustensiles, pour les mettre en état de former des troupeaux et de cultiver la terre, *et tout cela à ses propres frais*, qui se sont montés à des sommes immenses, sans compter l'argent qu'il a donné à chaque chef-de-famille, pour pourvoir à la subsistance de sa femme et de ses enfans."[1]

Thus, after their memorable year of misery, the Kalmucks were replaced in territorial possessions, and in comfort equal, perhaps, or even superior, to that which they had enjoyed in Russia, and

[1] When they arrived on our frontier (to the number of some hundreds of thousands, although by extreme fatigue, hunger, thirst, and all the other hardships involved in a very long and very painful march, nearly as many more had perished) they were reduced to the last misery: they were in want of everything. He [the Emperor, Kien Long] caused dwellings to be made for them suitable to their habit of living; he had food and clothing distributed among them; he had cattle and sheep given them, and implements to put them in a condition to form herds and to cultivate the earth; and all this at his own expense, which amounted to great sums, without counting the silver which he had given to each head of a family for providing for the support of his wife and his children.

"This is from a eulogistic abstract of Kien Long's own narrative by one of his Chinese ministers named Yu-min-Tchoung, a translation of which was sent to Paris by the Jesuit missionary, P. Amiot, together with the translation of the imperial narrative itself. The transcript is again by the French translator of Bergmann, and is again rather inaccurate."—MASSON.

with superior political advantages. But, if equal or superior, their condition was no longer the same: if not in degree, their social prosperity had altered in quality; for, instead of being a purely pastoral and vagrant people, they were now in circumstances which obliged them to become essentially dependent upon agriculture, and thus far raised in social rank, that, by the natural course of their habits and the necessities of life, they were effectually reclaimed from roving and from the savage customs connected with so unsettled a life. They gained also in political privileges, chiefly through the immunity from military service which their new relations enabled them to obtain. These were circumstances of advantage and gain. But one great disadvantage there was, amply to overbalance all other possible gain,—the chances were lost, or were removed to an incalculable distance, for their conversion to Christianity, without which in these times there is no absolute advance possible on the path of true civilization.

One word remains to be said upon the *personal* interests concerned in this great drama. The catastrophe in this respect was remarkable and complete. Oubacha, with all his goodness, and incapacity of suspecting, had, since the mysterious affair on the banks of the Turgai, felt his mind alienated from his cousin. He revolted from the man that would have murdered him; and he had displayed his caution so visibly as to provoke a reaction in the bearing of Zebek-Dorchi, and a displeasure which all his dissimulation could not hide. This had produced a feud, which, by keeping them aloof, had probably saved the life of Oubacha; for the friendship of Zebek-Dorchi was more fatal than his open enmity. After the settlement on the Ily, this feud continued to advance, until it came under the notice of the Emperor on occasion of a visit which all the Tartar chieftains made to his Majesty at his hunting lodge in 1772. The Emperor informed himself accurately of all the particulars connected with the transaction, of all the rights and claims put forward, and of the way in which they would severally affect the interests of the Kalmuck people.

The consequence was, that he adopted the cause of Oubacha, and repressed the pretensions of Zebek-Dorchi, who, on his part, so deeply resented this discountenance to his ambitious projects, that, in conjunction with other chiefs, he had the presumption even to weave nets of treason against the Emperor himself. Plots were laid, were detected, were baffled: counterplots were constructed upon the same basis and with the benefit of the opportunities thus offered.

Finally Zebek-Dorchi was invited to the imperial lodge, together with all his accomplices; and, under the skillful management of the Chinese nobles in the Emperor's establishment, the murderous artifices of these Tartar chieftains were made to recoil upon themselves; and the whole of them perished by assassination at a great imperial banquet; for the Chinese morality is exactly of that kind which approves in everything the *lex talionis*:[1]—

> "Lex nec justior ulla est [as *they* think]
> Quam necis artifices arte perire sua."[2]

So perished Zebek-Dorchi, the author and originator of the great Tartar exodus. Oubacha, meantime, and his people were gradually recovering from the effects of their misery, and repairing their losses. Peace and prosperity, under the gentle rule of a fatherly lord paramount, redawned upon the tribes; their household Lares,[3] after so harsh a translation to distant climates, found again a happy reinstatement in what had, in fact, been their

[1] The law of retaliation, in accordance with which the punishment corresponds in kind to the injury. This manner of punishment was established by the Mosaic laws. "Breach for breach, eye for eye, tooth for tooth: as he hath caused a blemish in a man, so shall it be done to him again" (Lev. xxiv. 20). Confucius, the greatest moral teacher the Chinese have had, taught, "Do not do unto another what you would not have another do to you."

[2] "There is no juster law than that plotters of murder should die by their own art."—OVID: *Ars Amatoria*, i. 655.

[3] Household gods, or the cherished possessions of the family.

primitive abodes; they found themselves settled in quiet sylvan scenes, rich in all the luxuries of life, and endowed with the perfect loveliness of Arcadian[1] beauty. But from the hills of this favored land, and even from the level grounds, as they approach its western border, they still look out upon that fearful wilderness which once beheld a nation in agony, — the utter extirpation of nearly half a million from amongst its numbers, and for the remainder a storm of misery so fierce that in the end (as happened also at Athens, during the Peloponnesian War, from a different form of misery[2]) very many lost their memory; all records of their past life were wiped out as with a sponge, utterly erased and canceled; and many others lost their reason, some in a gentle form of pensive melancholy, some in a more restless form of feverish delirium and nervous agitation, and others in the fixed forms of tempestuous mania, raving frenzy, or moping idiocy. Two great commemorative monuments arose in after years to mark the depth and permanence of the awe, the sacred and reverential grief, with which all persons looked back upon the dread calamities attached to the year of the *tiger*, — all who had either personally shared in those calamities and had themselves drunk from that cup of sorrow, or who had effectually been made witnesses to their results, and associated with their relief. Two great monuments, we say: first of all, one in the religious solemnity, enjoined by the dalai lama, called in the Tartar language a *Romanang;* that is, a national commemoration, with music the most rich and solemn, of all the souls who departed to the rest of paradise from the afflictions of the desert. This took place about six years after the arrival in China. Secondly, another, more durable, and more commensurate to the scale of the calamity and to the grandeur of this national exodus, in the mighty columns of granite and brass erected by the Emperor, Kien Long, near the banks of the Ily. These columns stand

[1] Arcadia was a district in the heart of the Peloponnesus, which the imagination of poets clothed in all pastoral and rural beauties and delights.

[2] See Note 3, p. 41.

upon the very margin of the steppes, and they bear a short but emphatic inscription to the following effect: —

By the will of God,
Here, upon the brink of these deserts,
Which from this point begin and stretch away,
Pathless, treeless, waterless,
For thousands of miles, and along the margins of many mighty nations,
Rested from their labors and from great afflictions,
Under the shadow of the Chinese Wall,
And by the favor of KIEN LONG, God's Lieutenant upon Earth,
The ancient Children of the Wilderness, — the Torgote Tartars, —
Flying before the wrath of the Grecian czar;
Wandering sheep who had strayed away from the Celestial Empire in the year 1616,[1]
But are now mercifully gathered again, after infinite sorrow,
Into the fold of their forgiving shepherd.
Hallowed be the spot forever,
and
Hallowed be the day — September 8, 1771!
Amen.

[1] This date, it is said, is not correct. The flight from China was in the reign of Oubacha's great-grandfather; some historians say fifty years, a Chinese mandarin seventy years, before the return.

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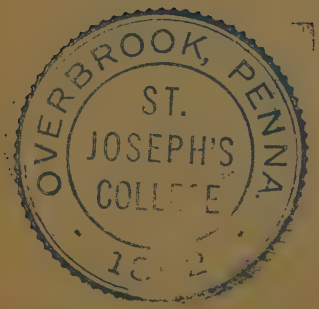

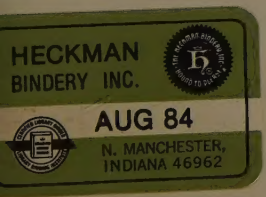
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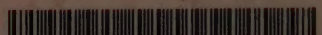
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